Observations
Lord Kames
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9
Gibbon (E.)

That which is placed in the foremoſt rank of "the ſecondary cauſes of the rapid growth of the "Chriſtian church," ſeems ſo ſingular, that, were it not exhibited in the very words of Mr Gibbon, my readers might ſuſpect me of having either miſunderſtood or falſified the original.

He ſays, that one of the cauſes of the rapid growth of the Chriſtian church was, "the inflex-"ible, and, if we may uſe the expreſſion, the into-"lerant zeal of the Chriſtians, derived, it is true, "from the Jewiſh religion, but purified from the "narrow and unſocial ſpirit, which, inſtead of invi-"ting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing "the law of Moſes;" i. 536.

Mr Gibbon heſitates to employ an expreſſion, which, when rightly underſtood, is altogether appoſite. For "the great principle of the Chriſtian "church is *intolerance*, and the zeal of the primi-"tive Chriſtians was *intolerant*."

Chriſtian zeal has no concern with the perſons or fortunes of thoſe who are inimical to Chriſtianity; and, *knowing of what ſpirit it is*, will not call for fire from heaven on its adverſaries.

But Chriſtians, believing in *one* God, could not enter into religious ſociety with men who believed, or were willing to have it thought that they believed, in a *multiplicity* of gods *. To ſpeak in ſcriptural language, they held, that *light hath no fellowſhip with darkneſs; and that the temple of God can have no agreement with idols;* 2. *Corinth.* vi. 16. 17.

* More will be ſaid on this topic when Jewiſh intolerance comes to be treated of.

Now, is not this *intolerant zeal*, however *purified from a narrow and unſocial ſpirit*, a cauſe of all others the moſt unlikely to accelerate the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity?

It has been *vulgarly* urged, that a religion, oppoſed by the inveterate prejudices of the people, and by the intereſts and policy of prieſts and legiſlators, *muſt* have met with obſtructions; and that, in ſurmounting ſuch formidable obſtructions, it *muſt* have had a ſuperior aid: But we "have changed all "that;" and now, the intolerant zeal of Chriſtians has become the firſt ſecondary cauſe of the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity.

Let me join in every eulogium that has ever been beſtowed, by the admirers of Mr Gibbon, on the judicious arrangement of his materials, in which there is nothing either wanting or ſuperfluous, on the purity and ſimplicity of his ſtyle, on his admirable flow of good humour, and on the acuteneſs and novelty of his general remarks; but let me not be compelled to acknowledge, that the intolerant zeal of the Chriſtians was "the firſt ſecondary cauſe of the "rapid growth of Chriſtianity."

The evidence produced in ſupport of his general propoſition ought to be heard. He begins with Moſes, as the wont is.

Mr Gibbon ſays, "The ſullen obſtinacy with "which the Jews maintained their peculiar rites "and unſocial manners, ſeemed to mark them out "as a diſtinct ſpecies of men, who boldly confeſſed, "or who faintly diſguiſed, their implacable hatred "to the reſt of human-kind;" i. 537.

In

In ſupport of this charge, he quotes the trite paſſage of Juvenal:

Tradidit arcano quodcunque volumine Moſes:
Non monſtrare vias, eadem niſi ſacra colenti;
Quæſitum ad fontem ſolos deducere verpos.

And he adds in a note, "The *letter* of this law is "not to be found in the *preſent* volume of Moſes. "*But* the *wiſe* and the *humane* Maimonides openly "teaches, that, if an idolater fall into the water, a "Jew ought not to ſave him from inſtant death. "See *Baſnage*, Hiſtoire des Juifs, l. vi. c. 28." i. 537.

One might be led to infer from this note, that, in the volume of Moſes which Juvenal uſed, there was an ordinance to the following effect: "Thou "ſhalt not ſhew the way unto the Heathen, neither "ſhalt thou diſcloſe the fountains of water unto the "uncircumciſed;" and that, in the *preſent* volume of Moſes, however much it may differ from Juvenal's copy, the *ſpirit*, although not the *letter* of ſuch an ordinance, is ſtill diſcernible *.

But

* *Johannes Britannicus*, an Italian commentator on Juvenal, roundly affirms, that Moſes *did* enact a law of the import mentioned by the ſatyriſt: "Moſes, ſays he, "*willed* that the Iſraelites ſhould be ſo totally averſe "from all other religions, as not to have any intercourſe "whatever, unleſs with men of their own faith; that "they ſhould not direct a Heathen on his way, or ſhew "him where water was to be had when he aſked it. "This is contrary to every ſentiment of humanity. But

But to ſuch inferences we may oppoſe a few paſſages ſelected out of the Pentateuch. " Thou ſhalt " neither vex a ſtranger, nor oppreſs him: for ye " were ſtrangers in the land of Egypt;" *Exod.* xxii. 21. — " Alſo thou ſhalt not oppreſs a ſtranger: for " ye know the heart of a ſtranger, ſeeing ye were " ſtrangers in the land of Egypt;" *Exod.* xxiii. 9. — " And if a ſtranger ſojourn with thee in your " land, ye ſhall not vex him. *But* the ſtranger that " dwelleth with you, ſhall be unto you as one born " amongſt you, and thou ſhalt love him as thyſelf; " for ye were ſtrangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* " the Lord your God;" *Levit.* xix. 33. 34.—" For " the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord " of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, " which regardeth not perſons, nor taketh reward. " He doth execute the judgement of the fatherleſs

" Moſes *thought fit* to treat thoſe who profeſſed a dif- " ferent religion from his own, in a manner that was al- " ways held, even by the Heathens themſelves, to be in- " human and barbarous." [*Voluit* Moſes Judæos adeo ab omni alia religione eſſe averſos, ut ne commercium quidem ullum haberent, niſi cum eo qui eadem ſacra coleret; nec viam erranti, nec aquam quærenti monſtrarent: quod contra omnem eſt humanitatem. *Putavit* tamen Moſes non indignum videri adverſus eos qui ſacra ſua non colerent; quod quidem apud omnes, vel Ethnicos, inhumanum et barbarum habitum ſemper fuit]. See *Juven. Sat.* xiv. l. 103. edit. *Henninii*, p. 650. It may be ſome apology for " *Johannes* Britannicus," that, while he miſrepreſents the law, he denies the divine legation of the lawgiver.

" and

" and widow, and loveth the ſtranger *, in giving " him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the " ſtranger: for ye were ſtrangers in the land of E- " gypt;" *Deut.* x. 17.—19.

We are taught from our youth to admire the energy of the words of Dido in Virgil:

I learn to pity woes ſo like my own †.

DRYDEN.

The expreſſion, " love the ſtranger, for ye were " ſtrangers in the land of Egypt," is ſtill more emphatical; it is a precept formed on an appeal to the feelings of a whole nation.

And although " the ſtranger that *dwelleth with* " *you*," may, perhaps, ſignify, " one who had em- " braced the Jewiſh faith;" yet all the other paſſages in which " ſtrangers" are mentioned, muſt be underſtood of " perſons without the pale of the " church."

If ſuch proviſions were made, in the law of Moſes, for the ſecurity and comfort of Heathens, we may certainly conclude, that nothing, either in the *letter* or *ſpirit* of that law, forbade the Jews to perform the general offices of humanity to ſtrangers, whom God loved.

He who wiſhes to avoid this concluſion, muſt either recur to the exploded hypotheſis, that the books

* ΖΕΥΣ ΦΙΛΟΞΕΝΟΣ, is a more endearing appellation, than ΖΕΥΣ ΞΕΝΙΟΣ.

† " Non ignara mali, miſeris ſuccurrere diſco."

of

of Moſes have come down to us in a mutilated ſtate; or, adopting an hypotheſis ſtill more extravagant, he muſt aſſert, that the Jews, the guardians of thoſe books, have foiſted precepts of humanity into them.

It is hard to diſcover the meaning or tendency of the ſequel of Mr Gibbon's note: "*But* the *wiſe* and "the *humane* Maimonides openly teaches, that if an "idolater fall into the water, a Jew ought not to "ſave him from inſtant death."

Are the epithets *wiſe* and *humane* uſed ironically, or do they import, that Jewiſh prejudices overcame the wiſdom and humanity of Maimonides?

The word "But" connects the two parts of the ſentence: and therefore it might be conjectured, that the author meant to ſay, that although no ordinance, ſuch as Juvenal mentions, can be found in the preſent volume of Moſes; yet that a wiſe and humane commentator on the Moſaical law ſuppoſes ſuch an ordinance to have exiſted heretofore in that law *.

The caſuiſtry of Maimonides was not derived from the Moſaical law, but from the traditionary maxims of the Jewiſh teachers; and all his wiſdom and all his humanity could not reſtrain him from drinking deep of that ſtream of corruption.

We need not wonder that ſuch was the caſe in the eleventh century, at which time Maimonides wrote;

* The ſtyle of Mr Gibbon is generally ſuppoſed to be clear; and yet I meet with many things in his work that ſeem ambiguous. If, at any time, I ſhould have the ill fortune to miſunderſtand him, he will pardon my miſtake.

for

for our Lord himſelf lamented that, even in his days, the teachers of Iſrael "made the commandment of "God of none effect by their traditions;" *Matth.* xv. 6.* And to the ſpecial example mentioned by one of the Evangeliſts, he added this general aſſertion, "and many ſuch like things do ye;" *Matth.* vii. 13.

To this wayward caſuiſtry there are other alluſions in the writings of the Evangeliſts. Thus, as it ſhould ſeem, from the precept, "Thou ſhalt love thy "neighbour as thyſelf," *Levit.* xix. 18. the Jewiſh teachers inferred, that an oppoſite precept, "Thou "ſhalt hate thine enemy †," *Matth.* v. 43. was alſo "the commandment of God."

The Heathens took no pains to make themſelves acquainted with the true import of the law of Moſes; and the Jewiſh caſuiſts, by their baſe gloſſes, diſfigured it. But *that* law ought not to be judged on the evidence of ignorant cavils, and perverſe interpretations.

In this ſection, intitled, "Zeal of the Jews," there are other particulars which merit explanation.

Thus, it is ſaid, that "the Jews multiplied to a "*ſurpriſing* degree in the eaſt, and afterwards in the "weſt."

* Philo Judæus alſo makes mention of this ingenious ſubterfuge. So that no one can imagine the caſe to be merely hypothetical.

† It is probable that the interpreters, who, at this paſſage, make a marginal reference to *Exod.* xxxiv. 12. *Levit.* xix. 18. and *Deut.* vii. 2. mean only to point out the texts in the Pentateuch that were perverted by the Jewiſh caſuiſts.

Some

Some reaſon ought to have been aſſigned for this *ſurpriſing* increaſe; and the more ſo, becauſe it is ſaid, preſently after, that "it ſeems probable that "the number of *proſelytes* was never much ſuperior "to *that* of *apoſtates*;"—that "the deſcendants of "Abraham were apprehenſive of diminiſhing the "value of their inheritance, by ſharing it too eaſily "with the ſtrangers of the earth;"—that "whenever *the God of Iſrael* acquired any new votaries, "he was much more *indebted* to the inconſtant humour of Polytheiſm, than to the active zeal of his "*own miſſionaries*;"—and that "the *painful*, and "even *dangerous* rite of *circumciſion*, was alone capable of repelling a willing proſelyte from the ſynagogue." i. 539.—541.

There is hardly a phraſe in all this hiſtorical and critical deduction that can paſs unobſerved.

The God of Iſrael, as Mr Gibbon muſt know, is alſo *the God of heaven and of earth*; and therefore HE could not be *indebted* for votaries, either to the humour of Polytheiſm, or to the zeal of Jewiſh miſſionaries.

Beſides, God did not ſend miſſionaries, before the days of the goſpel, with the purpoſe of converting Heathens to the belief of the Jewiſh religion.

Mr Gibbon obſerves, that the Jews increaſed *ſurpriſingly*, and at the ſame time he ſuppoſes, that this *ſurpriſing* increaſe was not owing to any acceſſion of proſelytes.

This propoſition, if proved, would go far to ſolve the problem, "Whether Polygamy promotes popu-"lation?" but we ought to be aſſured of the whole propoſition, before we draw inferences from it.

Heathen

Heathen writers ſeldom or ever ſpeak honourably of Judaiſm; and yet they ſeem agreed, that the number of proſelytes to that religion was great.

In the fragments of Seneca, we read, "So univer-
"ſally do the cuſtoms of *that moſt flagitious people*
"prevail, that now they are received all over the
"world. *The conquered have given laws to the con-*
"*querors* *."

And Tacitus ſays, "*The worſt of men every where,*
"*deſpiſing the religious rites of their own country,*
"were wont to pile up their contributions and alms
"at Jeruſalem †." And again, "The Jews inſtitu-
"ted the rite of circumciſion, in order to diſtinguiſh
"themſelves from the reſt of mankind. They *who*
"*have revolted* to the cuſtoms of the Jews do the
"ſame; and the firſt thing that they are taught is,
"to deſpiſe the gods, and to diveſt themſelves of
"patriotiſm ‡."

Seneca and Tacitus, however improperly they may have judged of the character of the proſelytes to Judaiſm, could not be miſtaken in this fact, that there were ſuch proſelytes, and thoſe ſo numerous, as to

* "Uſque eò *ſceleratiſſimæ gentis* conſuetudo convaluit, ut per omnes jam terras *recepta* ſit. *Victi victoribus leges dederunt.*" Seneca ap. *Auguſtin.* De civitate Dei, vi. 11.

† "Nam *peſſimus quiſque, ſpretis religionibus patriis,*
"tributa et ſtipes illuc congerebant." *Hiſt.* v. 5.

‡ "Circumcidere genitalia inſtituere, ut diverſitate noſcantur. *Tranſgreſſi in morem eorum* idem uſurpant;
"nec quidquam prius imbuuntur, quàm contemnere
"deos, exuere patriam." *Hiſt.* v. 5.

excite the attention, and perhaps the fears, of the Heathen world.

The decencies of modern language will not allow any detail with regard to "the *painful*, and even "*dangerous* rite of circumciſion." We may, however, obſerve, that it *could not* have deterred that ſex, to whoſe devotion Mr Gibbon aſcribes much of the ſucceſs of Chriſtianity, from avowing the Jewiſh religion; and that it "*did not* repel willing "proſelytes from the door of the moſque."

Mr Gibbon obſerves, that "the deſcendants of "Abraham — were apprehenſive of diminiſhing the "value of their *inheritance*, by ſharing it too eaſily "with the ſtrangers of the earth."

But the Jews could not imagine that their *temporal* inheritance was in danger of having its value diminiſhed by the coming of proſelytes amongſt them; and as for a *ſpiritual* inheritance, although many ſects may be apt enough to exclude adverſaries from a portion in it, yet they are generally willing to ſhare it with proſelytes.

Granting "the humour of Polytheiſm to have "been inconſtant *," it remains to be explained, how that inconſtancy ſhould have led Polytheiſts to embrace the doctrines of Theiſm.

* The Heathens were more inclined to receive new gods, than to diſmiſs old ones. For example, ſhapeleſs maſſes of ſtone were the moſt ancient idols. Terminus, a god of that ſort, would not make way for the Capitoline Jupiter; and his claim of poſſeſſion appears to have been allowed.

Again,

Again, it is ſaid in the ſame ſection, that neither violence, nor art, nor example, "could ever per-"ſuade the Jews to aſſociate with the inſtitutions "of Moſes the elegant mythology of the Greeks*;" and it is added, "The current of zeal and devotion, "as it was contracted into a narrow channel, ran "with the ſtrength, and ſometimes with the fury, "of a torrent." i. 558.

What are we to underſtand by all this? Does Mr Gibbon ſpeak in his *own* character, or in *that* of an unbeliever?

Was it reaſonable that the Jews ſhould aſſociate with the Moſaical inſtitutions a mythology, unſupported by proof, and whoſe uſurped authority "the "wiſeſt amongſt the Heathens had diſclaimed †;" and would it not have been abſurd for them to have aſſumed any part of a garb which did not ſit eaſy on thoſe who had long uſed it?

This, however, is not all. The Jews could not aſſociate "the elegant mythology of the Greeks "with the inſtitutions of Moſes;" for the Greeks were Polytheiſts, and the Jews profeſſed pure Theiſm. Now, I ſhould wiſh to know, how the belief and worſhip of *many* gods could be harmoniouſly united

* Mr Gibbon contraſts the moderation of the Roman Emperors with the jealous prejudices of their ſubjects; and he remarks, that "the *polite* Auguſtus *condeſcended* "to give orders, that ſacrifices ſhould be offered for his "proſperity in the temple of Jeruſalem." *Decline and fall*, i. 538.

† *Decline and fall*, i. 558.

with the belief and worſhip of the *One* God? It is hard then to accuſe that unfortunate people of ſullenneſs and obſtinacy, for not endeavouring to accompliſh impoſſibilities.

Once, indeed, they went a conſiderable length in the way of accommodation. They reſorted to Egypt, Phœnicia, and Syria, to the magazines from which the Greeks got the elegancies of their mythology, and with Jehovah they aſſociated any other divinity whoſe worſhip happened to be faſhionable amongſt the neighbouring nations: for they vainly imagined, that the ONE and SELF-EXISTENT, when he condeſcended to be, in an eſpecial manner, the God of a particular people, would communicate his honour to idols, the repreſentation of deified men, or of material objects.

If our ſacred books may be credited, this experiment of *aſſociation* proved fatal to the church and ſtate of the Jews; and it is admitted on all hands, that no farther attempts of the like prepoſterous nature were ever made: So, from that memorable æra, the devotion of the Jews became *contracted into the narrow channel* of the belief of *One* God, inſtead of gently expanding itſelf in the various and ſhallow tracts of Polytheiſm.

There follows a diſſertation on what Mr Gibbon calls, *the Nazarene church of Jeruſalem.*

In it he attempts to prove, that throughout the firſt century, and even during ſome part of the ſecond, there were, in effect, *two* Chriſtian churches; that circumciſion, and other rites of the Moſaical law, were practiſed in the one, but in the other rejected.

jected *. Mr Gibbon ſeems to hold, that the former, or *the Nazarene church of Jeruſalem*, had the faireſt pretences to orthodoxy; but that, being overpowered by the number of Gentile converts, and compelled by the neceſſity of the times, it agreed to relinquiſh its primitive rites, and to become incorporated with the latter, or *the church of the uncircumciſion*.

I do not propoſe to examine minutely a diſſertation foreign to the great object of Mr Gibbon's inquiries, and yet there are ſome circumſtances in it which deſerve attention.

"The firſt fifteen biſhops of Jeruſalem were all "*circumciſed* Jews, and the congregation over which "they preſided, united the law of Moſes with the "doctrine of Chriſt." In proof of this, there is reference made to Euſebius, *Hiſt. Eccleſ.* l. 4. c. 5.

Euſebius, no doubt, ſays, that the firſt fifteen biſhops of Jeruſalem were Hebrews by birth, and "of the circumciſion." He adds, that the church

* Toland, in his malicious rhapſody, called *Nazarenus*, goes farther. He ſays, that "the Jews, though "aſſociating with the converted Gentiles, and ac-"knowledging them for their brethren, were ſtill to "obſerve their own law throughout all generations; "and that the Gentiles, who became ſo far Jews as to "acknowledge *One God*, were not, however, to obſerve "the Jewiſh law; but that both of them were to be for "ever after united into one bond or fellowſhip;" *Preface*, p. 5. *This* the candid and conſiſtent author of *Pantheiſticon* is pleaſed to call *the original plan of Chriſtianity!*

at

at Jeruſalem was altogether compoſed of believing Hebrews.

But is it certain that all thoſe fifteen biſhops were "*circumciſed* Jews?"

"Of the circumciſion" may be a periphraſis, diſtinguiſhing the Jewiſh people from the Gentiles, without any reference being intended to the peculiar rite of circumciſion; and it has not been proved, that, *after* the burning of the temple in the days of Veſpaſian, the Hebrew Chriſtians perſevered in the uſe of that rite.

Beſides, it will be remarked, that Euſebius [l. 4. c. 5.] ſpeaks of the ſucceſſion of biſhops at Jeruſalem until the time at which the Jews were finally ſcattered in the eighteenth year of Hadrian. Now, from the burning of the temple under Veſpaſian, to the final ſcattering under Hadrian, there was an interval of no more than *ſixty-four* years; ſo that the greateſt part of the fifteen biſhops muſt have been born, and, probably, all of them may have been born before the burning of the temple *; hence they might have been circumciſed, although the practice of circumciſion had ceaſed amongſt the Hebrew Chriſtians at that remarkable æra.

But this is not all: for we learn from Euſebius, that Juſtus, the third biſhop of Jeruſalem, was a

* If we ſuppoſe, as is moſt likely, that Jude, the fifteenth biſhop, was younger than his predeceſſors, and that he had attained to the age of ſixty-four at the time when Hadrian ſubdued and deſtroyed Jeruſalem, it will follow, that all the fifteen biſhops were born before the burning of the temple under Veſpaſian.

converted

converted Jew *: Hence the circumſtance of his having been actually circumciſed, affords no preſumption whatever, that the Hebrew Chriſtians continued to practiſe the rite of circumciſion.

It is next ſaid, that "the Gentiles, with the approbation of their peculiar apoſtle, rejected the intolerable weight of Moſaical ceremonies." This is extraordinary; for we learn from Scripture †, that the apoſtles and elders at Jeruſalem did, in the moſt deliberate and ſolemn manner, pronounce the Gentiles to be free from that weight, which, it is here ſaid, they *rejected* with the approbation of their *peculiar* apoſtle.

Toland, it is true, took much pains to ſeparate Paul from the other apoſtles. But I imagined that the notions of Toland and of his copiſt Lord Bolingbroke, had been long ago exploded by every one converſant in the Scriptures ‡; and it is ſingular that

* Τῆς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐπισκοπῆς τὸν θρόνον Ἰουδαῖός τις ὄνομα Ἰοῦστος, μυρίων ὅσων ἐκ περιτομῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν, τηνικαυτα πεπιστευκότων, εἰς καὶ αυτὸς ὤν, διαδέχεται. *Hiſt. Eccleſ.* l. 3. c. 35. The words, εἰς καὶ αὐτὸς ὤν, which imply that Juſtus himſelf was a convert, are omitted in the verſion of Valeſius; and conſequently this fact cannot be known to thoſe who conſult his verſion alone.

† *Acts* xv. 1.——19.

‡ In the paſſage under conſideration, Mr Gibbon has committed a ſmall miſtake. He ſays, "The Nazarenes "retired *from the ruins* of Jeruſalem to the little town of "Pella beyond the Jordan;" p. 545. But it was *before* the ſiege of Jeruſalem by Titus, that the Jewiſh Chriſtians

that they ſhould have been again produced by Mr Gibbon, an avowed friend of Chriſtianity *.

Mr Gibbon ſeems to think, that the remnant of the Nazarenes of Jeruſalem, or the Jewiſh converts ſtians retired from the devoted city; *Euſeb.* Hiſt. Eccleſ. l. 3. c. 5. This retreat was in conſequence of the injunctions of our Lord, *Matth.* xxiv. 15. Euſebius ſays, ὰ μὲν ἀλλὰ καὶ τῦ λαυ τῆς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐκκλησίας, κατὰ τινα χρησμὸν τῆς ἀυτοθι δοκίμοις δι ἀποκαλύψεως δοθέντα προ τῦ πολέμυ μεταναςῆναι τῆς πόλεως, ϗ τινα τῆς Περαίας πόλιν οἰκεῖν κεκελευσμένυ. Πέλλαν ἀυτῆν ὀνομάξυσιν. κ. τ. ε. That which Euſebius here terms "a reve-"lation given to approved or reſpectable perſons," appears to have been an impreſſion made on their minds as to the juſt ſenſe of the words of our Lord, *Matth.* xxiv. 15. It is probable, that until the Chriſtians ſaw the ſtandards of Rome erected in Judea, they underſtood not the full import of the phraſe, "abomination of deſola-"tion."—Epiphanius, in his careleſs and incorrect manner, ſays, that the warning to remove from Jeruſalem was given by an angel; *De Ponderibus et Menſuris*, l. xiv. *tom.* 2. *p.* 171. *edit. Petav.* 1682; yet elſewhere he truly ſays, that the Chriſtians removed in conſequence of Chriſt's injunctions. *Hæres*, 29. t. 1. p. 123.

* This hypotheſis concerning the Nazarene church, in its nature extravagant, and dangerous in its conſequences, ought not to be aſcribed to Mr Gibbon. He has unwarily adopted the fancies of Moſheim, and preſented them to the public in an elegant Engliſh dreſs.

Moſheim, with very eminent literary abilities, could not always reſiſt the temptation of appearing ſingular; having

verts who adhered to the Moſaical law, were branded with the name of *the Ebionites* *.

He having diſengaged himſelf from the trammels in which his countrymen moved heavily, he ſometimes wandered from the road.

A paſſage in Sulp. Severus, which Moſheim admits to be " obſcure and ill arranged," [*De Rebus Chriſtianorum ante Conſtantin. M.* p. 325. note *], furniſhed him with materials for a ſyſtem highly praiſed by Mr Gibbon, [v. 1. p. 546. note 21.]

It required the genius of Moſheim to work up ſuch flimſy materials, and his reputation to give them vent.

Sulp. Severus thus ſpeaks: " Et quia Chriſtiani [in " Paleſtina] ex Judæis potiſſimùm putabantur, (nam- " que tum Hieroſolymæ non niſi ex circumciſione habe- " bat eccleſia ſacerdotem), militum cohortem cuſtodias " in perpetuum agitare juſſit, quæ Judæos omnes Hie- " roſolymæ aditu arceret. Quod quidem Chriſtianæ fidei " proficiebat, quia tum pene omnes Chriſtum Deum " ſub legis obſervatione credebant; nimirum id, Domino " ordinante, diſpoſitum, ut legis ſervitus a libertate fidei " atque eccleſiæ tolleretur; ita tum primùm Marcus e " gentibus apud Hieroſolymam epiſcopus fuit;" *Hiſt. Sacr.* l. 2. c. 31. It is irkſome for one to attempt a tranſlation, without having a clear apprehenſion of the import

* It is generally held, that the Ebionites were ſo called from the Hebrew word *Ebjonim*, that is, *poor*. Hence Toland ſays, " They were called, by way of contempt, " *Ebionites*, or *beggars*, juſt as the firſt Proteſtants in " Flanders, *gueux*." *Nazarenus.* p. 26. But unfortunately the name *gueux* is of political, not religious origin. The obſervation, however, was well meant.

He adds, for which he has the authority of the Fathers, from Juſtin Martyr to Auguſtin, that the Ebionites

port of the original. The meaning of Sulpitius ſeems to be this: "And as the Chriſtians [in Paleſtine] were underſtood to be chiefly compoſed of Jews, (for at that time the church of Jeruſalem had no prieſt but of the circumciſion), Hadrian ordered a band of ſoldiers to keep continual watch, and to exclude all Jews from entrance into Jeruſalem, which indeed proved advantageous to the Chriſtian religion; for, in thoſe days, almoſt every one who acknowledged the divinity of Chriſt, obſerved the Moſaical law. But Providence ſo ordered it, that the faith and the church ſhould be releaſed from the thraldom of the law; ſo then, for the firſt time, one out of the Gentiles, *Mark*, became biſhop of Jeruſalem."

Let us now ſee the commentary of Moſheim on this confuſed text. "It is certain," ſays he, "from the words of Sulpitius, 1. That the Chriſtians in Paleſtine, who were of Jewiſh original, joined the ceremonial law with the worſhip of Chriſt, ſo long as any hope remained of the reſtoration of Jeruſalem, after its *firſt* deſtruction by Titus. 2. That when all hope of ſuch an event ceaſed, at the *ſecond* deſtruction by Hadrian, the greateſt part of thoſe Chriſtians rejected the Moſaical law, and choſe Mark, a ſtranger, for their biſhop. This they certainly did, leſt a biſhop of the Jewiſh nation, through his innate affection for the law of his people, ſhould inſenſibly reſtore the abrogated ceremonies. 3. That the aboliſhing of the Moſaical law was occaſioned by the ſeverity of Hadrian, who ſurrounded the ſite of Jeruſalem with his ſoldiers, and debarred all Jews from entrance therein. This, ſays Moſheim, is not ſo clearly

"explained

Ebionites were held to be heretics: and it is to be preſumed, that no man in our days will diſpute the juſtice of that appellation.

But

" explained by Sulpitius as it ought to have been, but " his omiſſions may be eaſily ſupplied. While the Chri- " ſtians in Paleſtine continued to obey the law of Moſes, " they were conſidered by the Romans, and not without " ſome appearance of reaſon, to be Jews; ſo the prohi- " bition of entering into Jeruſalem, extended to them al- " ſo. But the Chriſtians, being exceedingly deſirous of " viſiting that city, renounced the ceremonial law, and to " prove the ſincerity of their conduct, elected a ſtranger " for their biſhop. This ſeparation having been once " made, the Romans allowed that acceſs to the Chri- " ſtians which was denied to the Jews." All this, according to Moſheim, may, with moderate attention, be *drawn* out of the words of Sulpitius, [" hæc omnia ex " Sulpitio, valdè licet negligenter ſcribat, mediocri at- " tentione adhibitâ, *eliciuntur.*"]

But Moſheim's alembic is capable of much more: " It " remains to be inquired," ſays he, " why the Chriſtians " ſhould have been ſo deſirous of having acceſs to Jeru- " ſalem, as rather to renounce their national law, and " to place a ſtranger over them for their biſhop, than to " remain deprived of that permiſſion?" On this point Sulpitius is ſilent, but his commentator enlarges. " Ha- " drian had erected a new city in the neighbourhood of " Jeruſalem, which he called *Ælia Capitolina*, and which " he endowed with ample privileges. The Chriſtians, " reſiding in the little town of Pella, and in the adjacent " country, were incommodiouſly lodged, and therefore " were very deſirous of being admitted as citizens in the " new colony; ſo moſt of them thought fit to aboliſh the

But he proceeds, in a note, p. 546. to obſerve, that "there is ſome reaſon to conjecture, that the "family

"ceremonial law inſtituted by Moſes; and by thus diſ-
"tinguiſhing themſelves from the Jews, they obtained
"admittance into *Ælia Capitolina*. It is *exceedingly pro-*
"*bable*, that that very Marcus, whom they choſe for
"their biſhop, ſuggeſted this project to them. His name
"ſhows him to have been a Roman; and, *no doubt*, he
"was known to the Roman governors in Paleſtine, and
"*perhaps* he was related to ſome principal perſon amongſt
"them."

Moſheim ſeems to have perceived that his hypotheſis was leading to ſtrange concluſions, and therefore he thought fit to check himſelf a little. "I would not have "it underſtood," ſays he, "that the Jewiſh Chriſtians "were led to reject the law of Moſes merely from the de-"ſire of eſtabliſhing themſelves at *Ælia Capitolina*. Un-"doubtedly Marcus, who perſuaded them to the mea-"ſure, did alſo demonſtrate, by weighty arguments, that "Chriſt had taken away the authority of the Moſaical "rites. His arguments, however, would have made leſs "impreſſion on the minds of perſons bred up, from their "tender years, in the law of Moſes, had they not longed "to be made partakers of the conveniencies and privi-"leges of the new colony, and to be relieved from the "vexations and hardſhips that the Jews ſuffered under "the government of Hadrian; and, in a word, had not "the ſecond deſtruction of Jeruſalem made them deſpair "of ever beholding the temple rebuilt, and liberty of "worſhipping God, after the manner of their own laws, "reſtored to the Jewiſh nation."

Thus we ſee, that had it not been for the arguments of Marcus, co-operating with the conveniency of reſi-

ding

" family of Jeſus Chriſt remained members, at leaſt " of the more moderate party of the Ebionites."

He quotes no authority for this ſlight conjecture, which, however ſlight, has a meaning. If *we* alſo may be permitted to conjecture, Mr Gibbon alludes to the following paſſage in the eccleſiaſtical hiſtory of Le Clerc. " *It may be* that, amongſt the inhabitants " of Choba in the apoſtolical times, there were ſome " Nazarenes, who gave themſelves out to be kinſ- " men of our Lord, and *perhaps* were ſo *." The

ding at *Ælia Capitolina*, the Jewiſh Chriſtians of Paleſtine might have continued for ages to uſe the Moſaical rite of circumciſion, and the Chriſtian rite of baptiſm, to celebrate the paſſover, and to partake of the holy communion. All this is proved from an obſcure, ill-arranged paſſage in an incorrect writer of the fifth century, who, to appearance, ſays no ſuch thing; and, which is more ſingular ſtill, it is proved by a critic who undertook to confute the *Nazarenus* of Toland! When we ſee the extravagancies of the learned, well may we pronounce, that " Pride was not made for man."

It does honour to the good ſenſe of Mr Gibbon, that, while tranſcribing from Moſheim, he has ſoftened ſome circumſtances, and omitted others: for all his eloquence would not have been ſufficient to convert the entire narrative from romance into hiſtory.

* *Nec quidquam vetat* inter temporum Apoſtolicorum " Chobenſes fuiſſe quoſdam Nazarenos, qui ſe δισποσύνας " dicerent, et *fortaſſe* eſſent." *Hiſt. Eccleſ.* p. 477. *note* 3. This may be true, but it is exceedingly improbable. See *Euſeb.* Hiſt. Eccleſ. l. 2. c. 23. l. 3. c. 11. c. 20. c. 32. Perſons any way connected with our Lord, appear to have been highly honoured in the Chriſtian church throughout the firſt century.

unvouched

unvouched *may be* and *perhaps* of Le Clerc hardly merited a place in the works of Mr Gibbon.

Mr Gibbon might, with propriety, have ſaid ſomething concerning the faith as well as the rites of the Ebionites, that remnant of the church of the Nazarenes, whoſe primitive tradition could have laid claim to be received as "the ſtandard of orthodoxy;" and this the more eſpecially, becauſe, as Mr Gibbon knows, Toland declares it to be the concurring opinion of the Fathers, "That the Nazarenes and Ebionites affirmed Jeſus to have been a mere man," &c. *

Although Mr Gibbon be conciſe in his account of the Ebionites, he is copious in deſcribing the character and opinions of the Gnoſtics. "They were," ſays he, "diſtinguiſhed as the moſt polite, the moſt "learned, and the moſt wealthy of the Chriſtian "name;" and, which is rather ſingular in men of that deſcription, "they were, for the moſt part, a-"verſe to the pleaſures of ſenſe."

"That general appellation [of Gnoſtics] which "expreſſed a ſuperiority of knowledge, was either "aſſumed by their own pride, or ironically beſtowed "by the envy of their adverſaries †."

Let us now ſee what that knowledge was for which they prided themſelves, or which their adverſaries envied in them.

* *Nazarenus*, p. 27.

† The expreſſion, "*envy* of adverſaries," proves that Mr Gibbon has not diſcovered any thing in the writings of St Paul or St John alluding to the name of *Gnoſtics*.

According

According to Mr Gibbon, they took exceptions at every part of the Old Teſtament, from the creation of the world to the end of the Jewiſh theocracy. He adds, in a note, "The milder Gnoſtics conſidered "Jehovah, the Creator, as a being of a mixed nature "between God and the demon. Others confounded "him with the evil principle."

So much for their judgement of the Old Teſtament, and for their belief in a Deity.

Now for their goſpel-faith. "It was their funda-"mental doctrine, That the Chriſt whom they ado-"red as the firſt and brighteſt emanation of the Dei-"ty, appeared upon earth, to reſcue mankind from "their various errors [of Paganiſm and Judaiſm], "and to reveal a *new* ſyſtem of truth and perfection."

To complete the picture, Mr Gibbon adds, "They "blended with the faith of Chriſt many *ſublime*, but "obſcure tenets, which they derived from oriental "philoſophy, and even from the religion of Zoroa-"ſter, concerning the eternity of matter, the exiſtence "of two principles," &c.

Such was the reſult of the *politeneſs* and *learning* of the Gnoſtics. The portrait may, for aught I know, bear a perfect reſemblance to them; but no feature of Chriſtianity can be diſcerned in it, excepting this, that the Gnoſtics and the Chriſtians concurred in believing the exiſtence of the devil; thoſe, as compoſing a *part* of the Divinity; and theſe, as the adverſary of God and man *.

* He had ſaid before, that the deity of the Gnoſtics was of a mixed nature, and ſometimes confounded with the evil principle.

With

With reſpect to the Gnoſtics, it is further ſaid, that " they were imperceptibly divided into more than " *fifty* particular ſects :—*each* of the ſects could " boaſt of its biſhops and congregations, of its doc- " tors and *martyrs*;" i. 550. This circumſtance ſeems important, if Mr Gibbon means, that *each* of the *fifty* ſects of the Gnoſtics produced " men who " ſuffered death for their adherence to the faith in " Chriſt."

Mr Gibbon quotes Euſebius as his voucher, [*Hiſt. Eccleſ.* l. iv. c. 15.]. The words of that hiſtorian are to the following purpoſe: " To the account of " the martyrdom of Polycarp there is added an ac- " count of other martyrdoms in Smyrna about the " ſame time; and amongſt the ſufferers was Metro- " dorus, appearing [or eſteemed] to be a preſbyter " in the error of Marcion, who, having been deli- " vered over to be burnt, was put to death *."

Here Euſebius mentions, amongſt the martyrs at

* Ἐν τῇ αυτῇ δὲ περὶ ἀυτῦ γραφῇ ϗ ἄλλα μαρτύρια συνῆπτο κατὰ τὴν ἀυτὴν Σμύρναν πεπραγμένα ὑπὸ τὴν ἀυτὴν περίοδον τῦ χρόνυ τῆς τῦ Πολυκάρπυ μαρτυρίας; μεθ' ὧν ϗ Μητρόδωρος τῆς κατὰ Μαρκίωνα πλάνης, πρεσβύτερος δὴ εἶναι δοκῶν, πυρὶ παραδοθεῖς ἀνήρηται. *Hiſt. Eccleſ.* l. iv. c. 15. Mr Gibbon might have added Aſclepius, ſuppoſed to be a Marcionite biſhop, who ſuffered in the laſt perſecution; *Euſeb.* De Mart. *Paleſt.* c. x. The account of the martyrs of Smyrna, firſt publiſhed by Archbiſhop Uſher, makes no mention of Metrodorus. If the zeal of the copiſt omitted him, it was zeal without knowledge.

Smyrna,

Smyrna, *one* perſon eſteemed to be a preſbyter of the ſect of Marcion; and yet that hiſtorian is appealed to as the *ſingle* witneſs for proving, that "each of "the *fifty* ſects of the Gnoſtics could boaſt of its "*martyrs*."

This is remarkable; for at that very moment Mr Gibbon had the article in Bayle's Dictionary, v. *Marcionites*, under his view.

Now, Bayle admits that the Gnoſtics, in general, did not yield themſelves to martyrdom in the cauſe of Chriſt. His inclination to contradict and to expoſe Jurieu, who had affirmed this, naturally led him to maintain the contrary. But the evidence of Tertullian was too clear to be obſcured, and too expreſs to be gainſaid *: ſo all that Bayle could do was to remark, that "although the Marcionites agreed in "certain points with the opinions of the Gnoſtics, yet "as to the point of ſuffering martyrdom, they might "have differed from them †."

Indeed, had not the diſciples of Marcion differed

* "Quum igitur fides æſtuat et Eccleſia exuritur, de "figura rubi, tunc *Gnoſtici* erumpunt, tunc *Valentiniani* "proſerpunt, tunc *omnes martyriorum refragatores* ebul-"liunt, calentes et ipſi offendere, figere, occidere." *Scorpiace*, c. i.

† "Il eſt bien vrai que Marcion convenoit avec les "Gnoſtiques en certaines choſes, mais cela n'empê-"choit point que ſa ſecte ne fut differente de la leur; et "ainſi, ſans un temoignage exprés, et ſans des preuves "particulieres, *on n'a nul droit de lui imputer les ſenti-"mens des* Gnoſtiques *touchant le martyre*." Dictionaire, v. *Marcionites*, note, E. viii.

in ſome tenets from the Gnoſtics, it is hard to ſay for what point of Chriſtian faith they could have ſuffered martyrdom.

Moſheim attempts to account for it thus: "The "Marcionites held, that violence ought to be done "to the body, as being compoſed of evil matter, and "of the dregs of the malevolent deity *." This, however, is a vague and fanciful conjecture.

Dr Jortin ſays, "That the Marcionites were put "to death, becauſe they acknowledged Jeſus to be "the Son of God, and would not renounce him, and "*ſacrifice to idols* †."

The latter part of this conjecture is probable enough; and it may fitly be ſaid, that the Marcionites, who died for that perſuaſion, were martyrs to truth. This teſtimony *unto blood* leaves no doubt of their ſincerity; and it would be preſumptuous for us to aſſert that it was unacceptable to God.

But this proves nothing as to the martyrs of the *fifty* ſects of the Gnoſtics! ‡

Mr Gibbon concludes his account of the Gnoſtics with theſe memorable words: "Though they con-"ſtantly diſturbed the peace, and frequently diſ-"graced the name of religion, they contributed to

* "Vim corpori eſſe inferendam, machinæ nimirùm ex "prava materia fœcibuſque maligni Dei conſtructæ." *De Reb. Chriſt. ante Conſtant. M.* p. 409. note ***.

† *Remarks on Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*, ii. 330.

‡ Dr Middleton [*Inquiry*, p. 209.] has a curious paſſage concerning the martyrs amongſt heretics. A learned reader will find amuſement in comparing the Doctor's paraphraſe of Euſebius with the original.

"aſſiſt,

" aſſiſt, rather than to retard the progreſs of Chri-
" ſtianity."

That men who conſtantly diſturbed the peace, and frequently diſgraced the name of Chriſtianity, ſhould have forwarded its progreſs, is a propoſition which at firſt ſight ſeems rather paradoxical.

It is not the general propoſition, that " God brings " good out of evil," which Mr Gibbon maintains here. *He* muſt be an incurious obſerver of the ways of Providence who queſtions it.

But this ſupplemental ſecondary cauſe of the progreſs of Chriſtianity is deſcribed to be ſomething of a very different nature. " The Gentile converts, " whoſe ſtrongeſt objections were directed againſt " the law of Moſes, could find admiſſion into many " Chriſtian ſocieties, which required not from their " untutored mind any belief of an antecedent reve-" lation. Their faith was inſenſibly fortified and en-" larged; and the church was ultimately benefited " by the conqueſts of its moſt inveterate enemies;" that is, the Gnoſtics became " ſchoolmaſters to " bring men to Chriſt." The road appears ſomewhat circuitous; but there is no reaſon to complain of that, ſince it proved a ſafe one.

The divine legation of Moſes was " fooliſhneſs" to the Gentiles, of whom Mr Gibbon ſpeaks; nor could the prophets under the law have been better received by them than Moſes was. There were many Chriſtian ſocieties, that is, ſocieties of Gnoſtics, into which the Gentiles could find admiſſion, without being obliged to lay aſide their prejudices, or to pay any regard to Moſes and the prophets. In thoſe ſo-

cieties they were inſenſibly led to yield their full aſſent to the doctrines of Chriſtianity.

Let us ſee what they were taught amongſt the Gnoſtics. God did *not* create the world; man did *not* fall from his original excellence; the legation of Moſes was *not* divine; *no* ſuch thing as a Jewiſh theocracy *ever* exiſted; the religion of Jeſus had *no* connection with the Moſaical œconomy; and, to complete all, Chriſt did *not* die on the croſs, and, conſequently, did *not* riſe again.

On ſuch foundations, if they may be ſo called, was Chriſtianity to be eſtabliſhed in the minds of the Gentiles: hence their faith became imperceptibly fortified and enlarged; and, in the end, the church received benefit from the triumphs of the Gnoſtics over moral evidence!

It has been ſometimes ſuppoſed, that he who has ſuffered himſelf to be deluded into the belief of abſurdities, may, with more eaſe, repudiate them, than embrace truth in their ſtead; and that he who is once made ſenſible of his having believed too much, is apt to diſbelieve every thing, and ſo exchange credulity for ſcepticiſm But it fared better with thoſe Gentiles who, having been inſtructed in a ſyſtem inconſiſtent even with the firſt principles of natural religion, were inſenſibly led to the knowledge and firm belief of revelation.

Mr Gibbon illuſtrates his hypotheſis by an hiſtorical example. He obſerves, in a note, that "Auguſtine is a memorable inſtance of this gradual progreſs from *reaſon* to *faith*. He was, during ſeveral years, engaged in the Manichæan ſect *."

* Vol. 1. p. 551. note 37.

I confeſs myſelf incapable of comprehending the ſenſe of this note. The contraſt between *reaſon* and *faith* may, in ſome reſpects, be juſt: But how can Auguſtine, by becoming a Chriſtian, after having been infected with the errors of Manes, be ſaid to have made a gradual progreſs from *reaſon* to *faith?* Surely Mr Gibbon could not intend to dignify Manichæiſm with the name of *reaſon!*

Let me remark, in paſſing, that the ſermons of Ambroſe, and a diligent peruſal of the epiſtles of St Paul, were the means of converting Auguſtine to the Chriſtian faith.

To the account of the Nazarenes and Gnoſtics, there is added one diſſertation under this title, "The "demons conſidered as the gods of antiquity;" and another under this title, "Abhorrence of the Chri-"ſtians for idolatry *." But as the ſentiments of the Chriſtians in thoſe particulars could neither ſerve to convert the Jews, nor to gain the approbation of the Heathens, they are foreign to the ſubject of Mr Gibbon's inquiry; and therefore they ſhall be paſſed over at preſent, with this ſingle obſervation, That what Mr Gibbon ſays of the univerſal influence of Paganiſm, although comprehended within a few pages, has the worth of a volume. It ſhows, in ſo ſtrong a light, the difficulties which Chriſtianity had to encounter, that it anticipates the confutation of what he ſays afterwards of the weakneſs of Paganiſm.

Ch. II.

The next ſecondary cauſe to which Mr Gibbon aſcribes the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity is, "The

* Vol. 1. p. 551.—56.

"doctrine

" doctrine of a future life, improved by every addi-
" tional circumſtance which could give weight and
" efficacy to that important truth." i. 536 *.

From the ſequel it appears, that under the notion of a *future life*, Mr Gibbon includes future puniſhments as well as rewards; and this he pronounces to be a doctrine true and important.

It *is* a truth implying in it another, no leſs momentous, a PROVIDENCE. On theſe is religious Theiſm founded, itſelf an excellent preparative for the rational belief of Chriſtianity.

Mr Gibbon proceeds to exhibit a view of the opinions of Heathen philoſophers concerning the immortality of the ſoul; and in this part of his work there are many things highly to be applauded. His concluſion, in particular, ought to be kept in remembrance: " Since, therefore, the moſt ſublime ef-
" forts of philoſophy can extend no farther than
" feebly to point out the deſire, the hope, or at moſt
" the probability of a future ſtate, there is nothing,
" except a divine revelation, that can aſcertain the
" exiſtence, and deſcribe the condition, of the in-
" viſible country which is deſtined to receive the
" ſouls of men after their ſeparation from the bo-
" dy †." i. 558.

* Biſhop Watſon, Dr Chelſum, and other writers, have ſo fully conſidered this part of Mr Gibbon's work, that little elſe remains for me but to recapitulate their obſervations.

† At p. 561. he ſpeaks of " the doctrine of life and im-
" mortality, which had been *dictated* by nature, *appro-*
" *ved* by reaſon, and *received* by ſuperſtition." This poſſibly is nothing more than a ſeeming contradiction.

There

There follows an account of the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul among the Pagans of Greece and Rome, and among the barbarians; an account not altogether correct, and, ſo far as it relates to the Druids, very obſcure.

With reſpect to what is next ſaid of the opinions concerning the immortality of the ſoul and a future ſtate, which were entertained by the Jews before the goſpel æra, it may be doubted, whether Mr Gibbon delivers his own judgement or that of others. His picture of the Sadducees, if at all like, appears to be very flattering and favourable; and as to the Phariſees, we might ſuſpect, that, in one particular at leaſt, he goes too far, when he ranks the "doctrine "of angels" amongſt "the *new* articles of faith which "the Phariſees accepted from the philoſophy or re-"ligion of the Eaſtern nations." But ſuch things, being foreign to the chief purpoſe of this treatiſe, ſhall not be enlarged upon.

We come now to that cauſe of the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity which Mr Gibbon terms, "The doc-"trine of a future life, improved by every additio-"nal circumſtance which could give weight and effi-"cacy to that important truth."

It is ſaid, That "when the promiſe of eternal hap-"pineſs was propoſed to mankind, on condition of "adopting the faith, and of obſerving the precepts "of the goſpel, it is *no wonder* that ſo advantageous "an offer ſhould have been accepted by great num-"bers of every religion, of every rank, and of eve-"ry province in the Roman empire." i. 561.

As Mr Gibbon is here treating of the ſecondary cauſes

cauſes which accelerated the progreſs of Chriſtianity, the evidences of the divine miſſion of Jeſus muſt be laid out of the argument. It would be a great abuſe of words, were one to reckon amongſt ſuch *ſecondary* cauſes the evidence of this fact, that " the Lord " is riſen indeed."

Yet, through ſome unaccountable inadvertency, Mr Gibbon has, at this place, introduced the reſurrection of Jeſus from the dead: for in no other ſenſe can the following words be underſtood. " It was ſtill " neceſſary that the doctrine of life and immorta- " lity — ſhould obtain the ſanction of divine truth " from the authority and *example* of Chriſt."

The reſurrection of Jeſus being once admitted, the proof of the other miracles ſaid to have been wrought by him, will hardly be brought into controverſy; and then the truth of his teſtimony, and the ſure promiſes of the Holy Spirit, become manifeſt. But this leads to the conſideration of the *original*, inſtead of the *ſecondary* cauſes of the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity: A ſubject very diſtant from the avowed purpoſes of Mr Gibbon's inquiry.

When, therefore, we lay aſide the evidences of the divine miſſion of Jeſus, as in treating of ſecondary cauſes we muſt do, *that* will appear moſt tranſcendently wonderful, and indeed incredible, which Mr Gibbon careleſsly terms *no wonder*.

Is it *no wonder*, that on a promiſe of eternal happineſs, made without authority or credentials, by ſome mean and obſcure perſons, for ſuch muſt the caſe be ſuppoſed, great numbers of every religion, and of every rank throughout the Roman empire, ſhould

ſhould have laid aſide all prejudices, embraced a faith contrary to eſtabliſhed opinions, and engaged themſelves in a new, difficult, and hazardous courſe of life?

To believe and to obey, "to adopt the faith and "to obſerve the precepts of the goſpel," is repreſented as a mighty eaſy matter. But ſhould we ſay, that there was nothing to hinder great numbers of Jews from believing in a ſpiritual deliverance and a ſpiritual kingdom, and great numbers of Heathens from believing in the reſurrection of dead bodies, the world might give us the name of *Theoriſts*.

Chriſtian immortality is a ſtate which, humanly ſpeaking, the Heathens who lived in the Evangelical times could neither underſtand nor aſpire after.

Mr Gibbon proceeds to mention the additional circumſtances which gave weight and efficacy to the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul.

"In the primitive church," ſays he, "the influ-"ence of truth was very powerfully ſtrengthened by "an opinion, which, however much it may deſerve "reſpect for its *uſefulneſs* and *antiquity*, has not "been found agreeable to experience. It was uni-"verſally believed, that the end of the world and "the kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near "approach of this wonderful event had been pre-"dicted by the apoſtles; the tradition of it was pre-"ſerved by their earlieſt diſciples; and thoſe who "underſtood, in their literal ſenſe, the diſcourſes of "Chriſt himſelf, were obliged to expect the ſecond "and glorious coming of the Son of man in the "clouds, before that generation was totally extin-

" guiſhed which had beheld his humble condition " on earth."——" The revolution of ſeventeen cen- " turies has inſtructed us not to preſs too cloſely the " myſterious language of prophecy and revelation; " but as long as, for wiſe purpoſes, this *error* was " permitted to ſubſiſt in the church, it was pro- " ductive of moſt ſalutary effects on the faith and " practice of Chriſtians, who lived in the awful ex- " pectation of that moment when the globe itſelf, " and all the various race of mankind, ſhould " tremble at the appearance of their divine Judge." i. 562.

To all this there is added in a note, " This ex- " pectation was *countenanced* by the 24th chapter of " St Matthew, and by the firſt epiſtle of St Paul to " the Theſſalonians."

Amidſt all this pomp of ſcriptural language, there is one obſervation which is hardly ſcriptural. An *error in doctrine* is ſaid to have been permitted for wiſe purpoſes, and to have powerfully ſtrengthened the influences of truth.

But ſeveral other things occur here that well deſerve our attention.

1. Mr Gibbon profeſſes to treat of " the ſecon- " dary cauſes of the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity;" and yet, inſtead of ſhewing *why* the Chriſtians became numerous, he changes the ſubject, and endeavours to ſhew *how* an error, ſuppoſed to have become prevalent amongſt Chriſtians, had moſt ſalutary effects on their faith and practice.

2. It may well be queſtioned, whether the immediate diſciples of our Lord believed that the end of the

the world was at hand. Granting, for argument's ſake, that, in the 24th chapter of Matthew, the end of the world might be underſtood as an event to follow preſently after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; yet ſtill our Lord foretold, in language not ambiguous, that great and important events ſhould enſue between *that* deſtruction and the conſummation of all things *. Now we may well ſuppoſe, that the firſt diſciples of our Lord would interpret any dark ſayings of their maſter, in a ſenſe conſiſtent with what he had more clearly delivered to them. The mode of interpreting paſſages to appearance plain, by paſſages obviouſly obſcure, was reſerved for other times.

3. To affirm that this approaching end of the world was univerſally believed in the apoſtolical times, is, with all deference to thoſe who have ſo ſaid, a palpable error: for St Paul knew the contrary to be truth, and openly avowed it in the face of the church. And it may ſeem ſingular to aſſert, that this expectation of the end of the world was *countenanced* by St Paul, in his *firſt* epiſtle to the Theſſalonians; while he himſelf, in his *ſecond*, poſitively declares, that he never ſaid or meant any ſuch thing; and added theſe remarkable words, deciſive of his opinion, "Let no man deceive you by any means; "for that day ſhall not come, except there come a "falling away firſt, and that man of ſin be reveal-

* Καὶ Ἱερυσαλὴμ ἔσαι πατυμένη ὑπὸ ἐθνῶν, ἄχρι πληρωθῶσι καιροὶ ἐθνων. *Luke*, xxi. 24.

" ed, the ſon of perdition *." And what he elſewhere ſays concerning the apoſtacy of latter times † proceeds on the ſuppoſition that the end of the world was not at hand.

It is true, that ſome men, in the apoſtles own times, miſunderſtood him; but after he had fully explained himſelf, it is likely that they did not continue in the wayward humour of ſtill miſunderſtanding him, and perverting his ſentiments.

4. This ancient and uſeful error, as Mr Gibbon is pleaſed to call it, could not have ſubſiſted long in the church; for the experience of one generation muſt have confuted it as effectually as " a revolution of " ſeventeen centuries;" and then it muſt have loſt all its ſalutary influence on the faith and practice of Chriſtians.

* 2. *Theſſ.* ii. 1.—3. All this has been fully explained and enforced by many learned men. See, in particular, *Halliſax*, ſermon v. p. 135.—140.

† 1. *Tim* iv. 1. It would be loſt labour to produce more paſſages from ſcripture to the like purpoſe. He who can heſitate on this point, after ſuch plain proofs have been laid before him, muſt remain unconvinced. As Mr Gibbon refers his readers to the " ingenious and " elegant diſcourſes" of Biſhop Hurd on the prophecies, I muſt preſume that he has read them; yet it is to be feared, that he read them merely as a model of ingenuity and elegance, without attending to their matter and weighty argument. The interpretation of the phraſe, " latter times," and the account of the diviſions of that period, *ſerm.* vii. would, if duly conſidered, have prevented many miſtakes.

Had

Had the prophecy been ſo underſtood, as Mr Gibbon ſays it was, the Chriſtians might have been led to diſtruſt the promiſes of our Lord, when they ſaw, that by the mere lapſe of time, or *the paſſing away of that generation*, the prophecy had become incapable of completion; and this would have retarded, inſtead of accelerating, the progreſs of Chriſtianity.

II. "The doctrine — of the Millennium was intimately connected with the ſecond coming of Chriſt." i. 562.

This ſeems a miſtake; for one main objection to the doctrine of the Millennium ariſes from the difficulties which occur in accommodating it to what our Lord has ſaid of his ſecond coming.

Mr Gibbon, in deſcribing more particularly the Millennary ſtate, obſerves, that "a city was erected "of gold and precious ſtones, and a ſupernatural "plenty of corn and wine was beſtowed on the adjacent territory; in the free enjoyment of whoſe "ſpontaneous productions the happy and benevolent "people was never to be reſtrained by any jealous "laws of excluſive property *."

"The

* There is added in a note, "One of the *groſſeſt* images may be found in Irenæus, [l. v. p. 455.], the diſciple of Papias, who had ſeen the Apoſtle St John." One might ſuppoſe, that ſomething of the nature of a Mahometan paradiſe was here underſtood. But the epithet *groſſeſt* ſeems to have been borrowed from Dr Middleton, *Inquiry*, p. 46.; and it only means, that the paſſage, literally taken, contains a *groſs* abſurdity. Papias, indeed, deſcribes the ſupernatural plenty in ſuch hyperbolical

"The doctrine of the Millennium—seems so well "adapted to the desires and apprehensions of mankind, that it *must* have contributed, in a very considerable degree, to the progress of Christianity." i. 563.

This, however confidently asserted, is without evidence. The doctrine of the Millennium, in its original form, is supposed to have been exhibited to St John. But men must, by some means or other, have been satisfied of St John's authority to publish that revelation before they gave credit to it; and accordingly we know, what it was reasonable for us to conjecture, that he addressed his account, not to the Gentiles, but to believers.

Besides, the hope of a temporary inheritance could not convert men to a religion which had given them the better promise of "a house eternal in the hea-"vens;" and the being with Christ on earth for a thousand years, was nothing to the being with him in a spiritual state "for ever."

bolical expressions, that we can hardly imagine him, silly as he was, to have meant any thing else but an allegory. It may be observed, in passing, that Dr Middleton, while treating of the doctrine of the Millennium, uses his wonted freedom of translation. "Irenæus," says he, "asserts "*that* doctrine from the authority of a tradition handed "down to him by *all* the old men who had conversed "with St John." The words of Irenæus are, *Quemadmodum presbyteri meminerunt, qui* Johannem *discipulum Domini viderunt, audisse se ab eo*, &c.; *Adv. Hæres*, l. 5. c. 33. that is, *old men*, not *all old men*. The interpolation is palpable, and its tendency obvious.

It

It is more probable, that the figurative expreſſions in St John came to be interpreted by Jewiſh converts into a reſemblance of that temporal kingdom which it was hard for them to renounce altogether, and by Gentile converts to be accommodated to the old popular notion of Fortunate iſlands and Elyſian fields *.

One thing Mr Gibbon muſt admit, that the doctrine of the Millennium, as being founded on the Apocalypſe, could not have contributed at all to the progreſs of Chriſtianity before the publication of that myſterious book. It follows, that the church paſſed twice through the flames of perſecution, and grew mighty by her trials and ſufferings, without the aid of this ſecondary cauſe.

What follows is inaccurately expreſſed, and conveys a meaning very different, it may be preſumed, from the intention of the author. "But when the "edifice of the church was almoſt completed, the "temporary ſupport was laid aſide, the doctrine of "Chriſt's reign upon earth was, at firſt, treated as "a profound allegory, was conſidered by degrees "as a doubtful and uſeleſs opinion, and was, at "length, rejected as the abſurd invention of hereſy "and fanaticiſm."

From this detail we might be led to ſuppoſe, that

* The prophecy in the 20th chapter of the Apocalypſe, be its ſenſe what it will, is not accompliſhed; neither have we any marks which might lead to the expectation of its ſpeedy accompliſhment: ſo, if we inquire at all into the nature of the Millennium, our inquiries ought to be modeſt and diffident.

the

the principal teachers in the Chriſtian church concurred in uſing the doctrine of the Millennium as a temporary prop to the fabric of religion, which they were employed in building, and that they threw it down whenever it became uſeleſs: yet ſurely Mr Gibbon did not mean this; for he knew that the doctrine of the Millennium, as deſcribed by himſelf, was diſliked by many eminent and learned perſons; and that, inſtead of miniſtering conſolation, it did, from the beginning, produce unprofitable contentions *.

He concludes this part of his diſquiſitions with the following words: " a myſterious prophecy, which " ſtill forms a part of the ſacred canon, but which " was thought to favour the exploded ſentiment, " has very narrowly eſcaped the proſcription of the " church." i. 563.

After the labour beſtowed by men of ſuperior literature in defending the authority of the Apocalypſe, it would ill become me to ſay much on the ſubject.

But the hiſtory of the " hair-breadth ſcapes" of the Apocalypſe is too ſingular to be diſmiſſed without a few remarks: And perhaps it may be in my power to add ſomething to that general argument which is, or at leaſt ought to be familiar to all who profeſs any knowledge of eccleſiaſtical antiquities.

* Ὡς καὶ σχίσματα καὶ ἀποστασιας ὅλων ἐκκλησιων γεγονέναι, are the emphatical words of Dionyſius of Alexandria, *Euſeb.* Hiſt. Eccleſ. vii. 24. He complains that many perſons in his time had become ſo fond of a book which they could not underſtand, as to neglect the ſtudy of the goſpels and epiſtles.

" In

" In the council of Laodicea, about the year 360, " the Apocalypſe was tacitly excluded from the ſa- " cred canon *by the ſame churches of Aſia to which it* " *is addreſſed*;" note (67.)

The expreſſion is lively, and in the faſhionable ſtyle of the eighteenth century; whether critically juſt, will be ſeen preſently.

If the letter to the ſeven churches of Aſia had been truly addreſſed to them by the Apoſtle St John, its authority would have been beyond juſt doubt.

Let us ſee the evidence produced for proving that the letter was not addreſſed to them by St John.

After an interval of more than *two hundred and ſeventy* years, the biſhops of Aſia thought fit to deny that their predeceſſors ever received ſuch a letter, and therefore they tacitly excluded it from the ſacred canon.

They did not, however, recollect, that copies of that letter had been circulated, at a very early period, throughout the Chriſtian church, and that the copies had become numerous*; that Papias, the con-

* It is plain, that, even in the times of Irenæus, there exiſted many copies of the Apocalypſe, ſome more ancient, and others of a more recent date; ſome of leſs, and others of greater authority: for he quotes a paſſage from it, of which there occurred various readings, and he determines for that reading which was to be found " in all good and ancient copies;" [ἐν πᾶσι τοις σπουδαίοις καὶ ἀρχαίοις ἀντιγράφοις.] *Adv. Hæres*, l. 5. c. 30. The original words are preſerved by Euſebius, *Hiſt. Eccleſ.* l. 5. c. 8.

 tempo:ary

temporary of St John, ſpake of it; that Juſtin Martyr, almoſt his contemporary, quoted it; that, in the next age, Irenæus produced about twelve paſſages from it; and, not to multiply authorities, that Clemens Alexandrinus appealed to it upwards of thirty times.

And it is to be preſumed, that they did not know that the Chriſtian authors who wrote before the middle of the fourth century, had transfuſed into their works almoſt every paragraph, and even ſentence of the Apocalypſe.

Had they recollected or known theſe circumſtances, it would have been more judicious and more modeſt for them to have aſked the concurrence of the Chriſtian world, before they proceeded to what Mr Gibbon imputes to them.

Hitherto the hypotheſis has been admitted, That "the ſame churches of Aſia to which the Apocalypſe was addreſſed, did tacitly exclude it from the "ſacred canon."

But this will be thought very doubtful, when the nature of the council of Laodicea, and the purport of its ſixtieth canon, to which Mr Gibbon alludes, are conſidered.

A provincial council was aſſembled in the fourth century, at Laodicea in Phrygia, probably between the year 370 and 380. The meeting was an obſcure one; and as nothing paſſed at it which in thoſe days was held to be of importance to the Chriſtian world, its preciſe æra has not been aſcertained.

The canons made in that council are loſt; but there is extant a ſummary of them in Greek, with two

two verſions of it, the one by Iſidorus, ſurnamed *Mercator*; and the other by Dionyſius, ſurnamed *Exiguus*.

In the title of this ſummary, the council is thus deſcribed: "The Holy Synod gathered together at "Laodicea in *Phrygia Pacatiana*, out of various ju-"riſdictions of [the dioceſe] *Aſiana* *."

It was neceſſary to make this obſervation on the title †, becauſe learned men, not ſuppoſing the matter to be of any conſequence, have confided in the juſtneſs of the verſions made by Iſidorus and Dionyſius.

Iſidorus tranſlates ἐκ διαφόρων ἐπαρχίων τῆς Ασιανῆς, "Ex diverſis regionibus Aſiæ;" and Dionyſius, "Ex "diverſis provinciis *Aſiæ*;" and hence the title has been ſuppoſed to contain the word *Aſia*, and its ſenſe has been miſunderſtood.

The word *Aſiana* implies *diœceſis Aſiana*, a tract of country governed by an officer termed *Vicarius Aſianæ diœceſeos*. Under that dioceſe, *Aſia Major*, comprehending the cities of Epheſus and Smyrna, was not accounted; and accordingly the biſhops of thoſe cities appeared at the general council of Nice, as

* Ἡ ἁγία Σύνοδος ἡ κατὰ Λαόδικειάν τῆς Φρυγίας Πακατιανῆς συνκροτηθεῖσα ἐκ διαφόρων ἐπαρχίων τῆς Ασιανῆς. *Harduin.* Concil. i. 782.

† The title itſelf ſeems to be of no authority; for, if I miſtake not, Laodicea on the river Lycus, the place here meant, was ſituated in *Phrygia Salutaris*, and not in *Phrygia Pacatiana*.

from *Aſia Major* *, and not from the dioceſe *Aſiana*. It follows, that *two* at leaſt of the *ſeven* churches, and theſe by far the moſt eminent, neither had nor could have had any concern in the deliberations of the council of Laodicea; and that they did not even "tacitly exclude the Apocalypſe from the ſacred ca-"non."

It ſeems probable, that the council at Laodicea was compoſed of the Phrygian biſhops, and of ſome few biſhops from other diſtricts of the dioceſe *Aſiana*.

Iſidorus relates, that *twenty-two* biſhops, aſſembled at that council; at the council of Nice *forty-two* biſhops, from the dioceſe *Aſiana*, aſſembled. This ſhows, not only that the number of biſhops at the council of Laodicea was ſmall, but alſo that a much larger number might have been aſſembled there, if the biſhops of the dioceſe *Aſiana* † had all taken their ſeats.

And now we ſee that we ſhould form a very wrong eſtimate of the council of Laodicea, were we to conſider it as the repreſentative of the whole churches of Aſia.

Having thus ſeen what was the nature of that council, let us examine what it did in relation to the Apocalypſe.

By its 59th canon, the council enacted, "That "pſalms, the compoſition of private perſons, and

* Menophantus Biſhop of Epheſus, and Eutychius Biſhop of Smyrna.

† I preſume that the reader will obſerve, that the word *dioceſe* is uſed for a civil diſtribution of territories in the lower empire.

"unca-

"uncanonical books, ſhould not be rehearſed in "church; but that the canonical books alone of "the Old and New Teſtament ſhould be ſo re-"hearſed *."

In the 60th canon, there is a liſt of the books which ought to be read, [ἀναγινώσκεσθαι]. That liſt contains Baruch, with *the epiſtle*, ſuppoſed to be the 6th chapter of Baruch; but it does not contain the Apocalypſe. This ſeems to be a fair ſtate of the fact.

Here it is to be obſerved, that the verſion by Dionyſius Exiguus does not contain the 60th canon; and hence we may conclude, that in the Greek ſummary which he tranſlated, no ſuch canon was to be found. Such being the caſe, one may doubt of its authenticity. Iſidorus Mercator, who lived in a later age than Dionyſius Exiguus †, might have tranſlated it from a copy which did not exiſt when Dionyſius made his verſion.

Beſides, the verſion of Iſidorus ſays more than what is in the Greek ſummary. Its words are, "What books ought to be read ‡," [ὅσα δεῖ βιβλία

* Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ ἰδιωτικοὺς ψαλμοὺς λέγεσθαι ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ οὐδὲ ἀκανόνιστα βιβλία, ἀλλὰ μόνα τὰ κανονικὰ τῆς καινῆς καὶ παλαιᾶς διαθήκης. No other word but *rehearſed* occurs for λέγεσθαι.

† Dionyſius lived in the 6th century. He is remarkable for having, in his *Cyclus Paſchalis*, introduced the computation of time from the birth of Chriſt. His æra begins with what he calls the year 533. Iſidorus lived in the eighth century.

‡ "To be read," is uſed as being the moſt literal tranſlation; but it is admitted on all hands, that the word means "to be publicly read in churches."

ἀναγινώσκεσθαι],

ἀναγινώσκεσθαι], but the verſion adds, "and to be re-"ceived as authoritative," [et in auctoritatem recipi]. This changes the ſenſe altogether; for the biſhops at Laodicea might have had prudential reaſons for not allowing the Apocalypſe to be read in churches *, and yet might have entertained no ſuſpicion as to its genuineneſs and authority †. This may be the import of the 60th canon, as it is in the Greek; but the verſion of Iſidorus implies more.

Thus the reſult of the whole is, that if the 60th canon of the council at Laodicea be authentic, twen-

* The church of England allows no more than ſeven chapters of the Apocalypſe to be publicly read, [ch. i. iv. vii. xii. xiv. xix. xxii.], and yet ſhe accounts the whole book to be canonical; and *ſo* ſhe might have accounted it, although thoſe *ſeven* chapters had been omitted in the public reading, as well as the other *fourteen*.

† If, as is moſt likely, the Biſhop of Laodicea bare ſway in the council, we may ſee a reaſon why he ſhould have wiſhed to exclude *ſome* part of the Apocalypſe from the public reading. As, in ſome churches, the praiſe beſtowed on them, at a particular ſeaſon, has been arrogated to ſucceeding generations; ſo the cenſure on the church at Laodicea, c. iii. 14 &c. might have been underſtood to affect poſterity in after ages. Here let it be obſerved in paſſing, that Laodicea was overthrown by an earthquake, A. U. C. 813; and that the Neronian perſecution began A. U. C. 817.; it is not probable that St John would have addreſſed the Laodiceans, as he does at ver. 17. had their city been ruined about *five* years before. This may contribute to ſupport the very ancient tradition, that the Apocalypſe was publiſhed under the perſecution by Domitian.

ty-

ty-two biſhops of Aſia, towards the end of the fourth century, made no mention of the Apocalypſe while they were enumerating the books to be read in churches. Thus the Apocalypſe did not at that time make ſo "narrow an eſcape from the proſcription of "the church," as Mr Gibbon imagines *.

But it ſeems "that the *ſentence* of the biſhops at "Laodicea had been *ratified* by the greater number "of Chriſtians" in the days of Sulpicius Severus †.

The importance of the teſtimony of Sulpicius Severus depends on the meaning of the word *plerique*, which he uſes; and the queſtion is, whether, in the paſſage alluded to, it implies *many* or *moſt*

After having poſitively aſſerted that St John the Apoſtle wrote the Apocalypſe during his baniſhment to Patmos, and under the reign of Domitian, he adds, "which book indeed, either fooliſhly or im-"piouſly, is not received by *many* [or by *moſt*] men ‡.

Mr Davis has collected examples ſufficient for proving, to the ſatisfaction of any impartial reader, that Sulpicius Severus frequently uſes the word *plerique*

* In juſtice to Mr Gibbon, it muſt be obſerved, that what he ſays as to the rejection of the Apocalypſe by the churches of Aſia, is merely an improvement on Mill's *Prologomena*. Mill may have been an able collator of manuſcripts, but he was not poſſeſſed of any critical acumen; witneſs his defence of the authenticity of the 2d epiſtle of St Peter, in which his prime argument is, that if the epiſtle was not written by that ſaint, it muſt have been written by an impoſtor.

† About the beginning of the fifth century.

‡ "Qui quidem a pleriſque, aut ſtultè aut impiè, non "recipitur." *Hiſt. Eccleſ.* ii. 45.

in

in the ſenſe of *ſeveral* or *many*; and that he ſo uſes it when the context poſitively excludes the other interpretation of *moſt* *.

To this let me add, that Sulpicius Severus could never have meant to ſay, that *the greater number* of Chriſtians at large did not receive the Apocalypſe as a book of authority. In his days, the Chriſtians of the Weſt and of the South received it without heſitation; and, had he ſaid the contrary, we muſt have admitted that he oppoſed himſelf to hiſtorical truth, either with the view of ſerving ſome favourite hypotheſis, or from caprice, and an affectation of ſingularity. Love for a favourite hypotheſis, the impulſe of caprice, and the pride of profeſſing ſingular notions, may have perverted the judgement of abler men than Sulpicius Severus; but theſe cauſes, however forcible, could ſcarcely have had the effect of making him ſay, that the greater number of Chriſtians differed from his *own* opinion.

Further, a perſon who had liſted himſelf in a depreſſed party, might have been apt to ſay, that *moſt* men, or *the multitude*, were fooliſh or impious, when they favoured opinions inconſiſtent with his own. But Sulpicius Severus ſtood not in that predicament. He thought of the Apocalypſe as the Italian and African churches, and as many other churches did; and it is hardly poſſible that he ſhould have included them under a pitiful minority; this, however, he muſt have done, had he meant to ſay that *moſt men* would not receive the Apocalypſe.

11 JY 63

* *Reply* to Mr Gibbon's Vindication, p. 71.

Observations by Lord Hailes
Gibbon
8142.b
10

To the virtues of the primitive Christians, the *fourth* cause of the rapid growth of Christianity is ascribed.

" The primitive Christian," says Mr Gibbon, " demonstrated his faith by his virtues; and it was " *very justly supposed*, that the divine persuasion, " which enlightened *or* subdued the understanding, " must, at the same time, purify the heart, and di- " rect the actions of the believer. The first apolo- " gists of Christianity, who justify the innocence of " their brethren,—display, in the most lively co- " lours, the reformation of manners which was in- " troduced into the world by the preaching of the " gospel *."

Here the virtues of the primitive Christians are acknowledged: it might, however, have been wished, that a less ambiguous phrase had been used than that of, " the divine persuasion which enlightened " *or* subdued the understanding." Every considerate reader will remark the singularity of the alternative. It is one of the offices of the Holy Spirit, to " enlighten the understanding;" but to " subdue" it, is none of them, unless the word " understand- " ing" be taken in a different sense, when it is said to be " subdued," than when it is said to be " en- " lightened." Such change of terms, however allowable to rhetoricians, cannot be admitted in historical reasoning.

Mr Gibbon might have said, " the divine persua- " sion, which enlightened the understanding and " subdued the will;" that is, the wayward propen-

* V. 1. p. 572.

ſities of human nature: theſe, undoubtedly, are the offices of the Holy Spirit.

But to proceed. Mr Gibbon concurs with St Paul in ſuppoſing, that "the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering [patience], gen-"tleneſs, goodneſs, faith [or faithfulneſs], meek-"neſs, temperance *;" and he even acknowledges the ſuppoſition to be *very juſt.*

And yet, inſtead of proceeding to ſhow how the virtues of the primitive Chriſtians tended to convert Heathens, or made *others to glorify their Father*, he at once deviates from his ſubject; and, if the phraſe may be allowed, begins with a digreſſion.

"As it is my intention," ſays he, "to remark "only ſuch *human* cauſes as were permitted to ſe-"cond the influence of revelation, I ſhall ſlightly "mention two *motives* which might *naturally* render "the lives of the primitive Chriſtians much purer "and more auſtere than thoſe of their Pagan con-"temporaries,—Repentance for paſt ſins, and the "laudable deſire of ſupporting the reputation of the "ſociety in which they were engaged."

Thus, inſtead of deſcribing the *effects* which the virtues of the primitive Chriſtians had in the converting the Heathen world, Mr Gibbon favours us with a diſſertation on the *cauſes* of thoſe virtues.

He begins with two propoſitions, which are of great moment. The firſt is, That the primitive Chriſtians were virtuous; and the ſecond, That they were more virtuous than their Pagan contemporaries. Theſe propoſitions will be admitted by

* *Galat.* v. 22, 23.

all

all men who, like Mr Gibbon, are acquainted with the hiſtory of the primitive church, and with the tenets and manners of Paganiſm in the early times of Chriſtianity.

But, as ſome of the admirers of Mr Gibbon may chance to be leſs converſant in antiquity than he is, it will not be improper to fix in their minds *his* decided opinion, that THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS WERE VIRTUOUS, and that THEY WERE MORE VIRTUOUS THAN THEIR PAGAN CONTEMPORARIES.

Let us now follow Mr Gibbon in his digreſſion, and inquire into the *natural motives* which impelled the Chriſtians to be *more excellent than their neighbours*.

" It is a very ancient reproach, ſuggeſted by the " *ignorance* or the *malice* of infidelity, that the Chri- " ſtians allured into their party *the moſt atrocious* " *criminals*; who, as ſoon as they were touched by " a ſenſe of remorſe, were eaſily perſuaded to waſh " away, in the water of baptiſm, the guilt of their " paſt conduct; for which the temples of the gods " refuſed to grant them any expiation *."

In proof of this propoſition, Celſus and Julian are quoted.

Julian, in his open, as well as in his more politic and covert attempts againſt Chriſtianity, was *malicious*, but we cannot, with propriety, term him *ignorant*.

And the like may be obſerved as to Celſus; who, under the perſonated character of a Jew, miſinter-

* V. i. p. 573.

prets the Scriptures, and takes every advantage that the folly or fanaticiſm of Chriſtian individuals afforded him.

This *perſonated character*, and theſe *little arts of controverſy*, tend to ſhow that he was not ſo much an *ignorant*, as a *malicious* enemy; and therefore, until ſome other evidence than that of Celſus and Julian be produced, "the ignorance of infidelity" ſeems out of the queſtion.

Mr Gibbon ſays, "the *malice* of infidelity ſuggeſted, that the moſt atrocious criminals, as ſoon as they were touched by a ſenſe of remorſe, were *eaſily perſuaded* to waſh away, in the water of baptiſm, a guilt for which the temples of the gods refuſed to grant them any expiation."

That "the temples of the gods refuſed to grant any expiation" is a poetical phraſe, importing, "that the miniſters of the popular religion amongſt the Pagans *refuſed* to grant *that* expiation to criminals, which the Chriſtian teachers *perſuaded* them to receive by baptiſm."

So ſcrupulous and ſevere were the Pagan prieſts, and on ſuch eaſy terms might any one be admitted into the Chriſtian church!

But *here*, as every one muſt perceive, the malicious infidels affected to be ignorant of the genius of Paganiſm *.

It is ſaid, that "the moſt atrocious criminals were eaſily perſuaded to waſh away their guilt in the water of baptiſm."

* It may be remarked, in paſſing, that the Greek ἄγος, and the Latin *piaculum*, mean *ſin*, as well as *expiation for ſin*.

Now

Now this implies, that, according to the principles of Chriſtianity, the mere rite of baptiſm had the ſingular virtue of waſhing away guilt; and that the miniſters of Chriſt did not require from their proſelytes any belief of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, or any engagements to amend in future; or, more briefly thus, that "they held out baptiſm to be, in itſelf, "a charm for the expiation of ſins."

Celſus, it is probable, knew, and without doubt Julian did, that this was preciſely the reverſe of what Chriſt and his apoſtles taught, and the diſcipline of the primitive church enforced.

Here we ſee *that* ſpirit, which Mr Gibbon well terms, "the malice of infidelity."

"Baptiſm," ſays Dr Bentley, "is rallied as *mere* "*waſhing*; and repentance, as *thumping the breaſt*, "or other outward grimace. The inward grace "and the intrinſic change of mind, are left out of "the character; and *whom* are we to believe? theſe "Pagans, or our own ſelves? Are we to fetch our "notions of the ſacraments from ſcraps of Julian "and Celſus? or from the Scripture, the pure "fountain, and from what we read, know, and "profeſs *?"

Theſe are obvious remarks; but Mr Gibbon appears to have conſidered the ſubject in a more uncommon point of view; for he ſays, "this reproach, "*when it is cleared from miſrepreſentation*, contri-"butes as much to the honour as it did to the in-

* *Remarks upon a late Diſcourſe of Freethinking*, § xliii.

"creaſe

" creaſe of the church *. The friends of Chriſti-
" anity may acknowledge, without a bluſh, that
" *many of the moſt eminent ſaints had been before*
" *their baptiſm the moſt abandoned ſinners.* Thoſe
" perſons, who in the world had followed, though
" in an imperfect manner, the dictates of benevo-
" lence and propriety, derived ſuch a calm ſatisfac-
" tion from the opinion of their own rectitude, as
" rendered them much leſs ſuſceptible of the ſud-
" den emotions of ſhame, grief, and of terror,
" *which have given birth to ſo many wonderful con-*
" *verſions.* After the example of their divine ma-
" ſter, the miſſionaries of the goſpel diſdained not
" the ſociety of men, and *eſpecially of women*, op-
" preſſed by conſciouſneſs, and very often by the
" effects of their vices. As they emerged from ſin
" and ſuperſtition, to the glorious hope of immor-
" tality, they reſolved to devote themſelves to a
" life, not only of virtue, but of penitence. The
" deſire of perfection became the ruling paſſion of
" their ſoul; and *it is well known, that, while rea-*
" *ſon embraces a cold mediocrity, our paſſions hurry*
" *us, with rapid violence, over the ſpace which lies*
" *between the moſt oppoſite extremes.*"

Mr Gibbon ſays well, in calling Jeſus " Divine " Maſter;" for " ſo he is;" and yet the common appellation of *Jeſus*, by which he is known even amongſt the Mahometans, would have been more ſimple, and have ſounded better in this paſſage.

* The phraſe is uncommon in modern language. *Reproach* is here uſed for the circumſtance with which the primitive Chriſtians were reproached.

The

The phraſe, "the apoſtles and firſt teachers of "Chriſtianity," might have been uſed, inſtead of "the miſſionaries of the goſpel;" and no one could have objected to the word "Chriſtians," inſtead of "the ſaints."

It is the purpoſe of Mr Gibbon to "clear the re-"proach from miſrepreſentation." He begins by admitting the fact charged; and, with a ſort of conſcious exultation, he adds, that "many of "the moſt eminent ſaints [or Chriſtians] were, "before their baptiſm, the moſt abandoned ſin-"ners;" and, leſt the fact ſhould be diſputed, he ſubjoins an elaborate argument, for proving, that it muſt have been ſo, from "the reaſon of the "thing."

In this he is praiſe-worthy, that he begins with facts, and does not, like ſome theoriſts, firſt lay down "the reaſon of the thing," and then accommodate facts to it.

Perhaps Mr Gibbon overlooked the ambiguity of his propoſition.

One cannot, with abſolute certainty, ſay, whether he means to ſpeak both of the Jews and the Gentiles, who, in the earlieſt times, became converts to Chriſtianity, or of the Gentiles only.

But as he mentions the apoſtles in general, without diſtinguiſhing St Paul from the original diſciples of Jeſus, we may conclude that he ſpeaks both of Jewiſh converts and Gentile, and therefore his words ſhall be taken in their moſt extenſive meaning.

Celſus ſays, that the apoſtles were, "infamous "perſons,

" perſons, publicans, and boatmen, exceedingly " wicked *."

Origen conjectures, that this delineation of the manners of the firſt diſciples is copied from a paſſage in the epiſtle, that goes under name of Barnabas, which ſays, " Jeſus ſelected for apoſtles, to " preach his goſpel, *men ſinful above all other ſinners*; that he might prove, that he *came, not to* " *call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance* †."

This epiſtle was not written by Barnabas, the celebrated companion of St Paul; and indeed it is not mentioned by any Chriſtian writer till near the cloſe of the ſecond century ‡.

The aſſertion of this unknown author ſeems to have been grounded, not on any hiſtorical facts, but on an inference from that ſaying of Jeſus, that " he came not to *call* the righteous, but ſinners to

* Επιῤῥήϛους ἀνθρώπους, τελώνας, καὶ ναύλας, τοὺς πονηροτάϛους. *Celſus* ap. *Origen.* l. i. p. 47. edit. *Spencer.*

† Τοὺς ἰδίους ἀποϛόλους, τοὺς μέλλονϛας κηρύσσειν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον αὐϛῶ ἐξελέξαϛο, ὁνϛας ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἁμαρϛιὰν ανομωτέρους; ἵνα δείξῃ, ὅτι οὐκ ἐλθὴ καλέσαι δικαίους, ἀλλ' ἁμαρτωλοὺς εἰς μετάνοιαν. § 5.

‡ In that epiſtle it is ſaid of the temple of Jeruſalem, " In conſequence of the war waged by the Jews, *that* " temple was overthrown by the enemies, and now the " miniſters of the enemies rebuild it." [Διὰ γὰρ το πολεμεῖν αὐϛοὺς, καθῃρέθη ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, νῦν καὶ αὐϛοὶ οἱ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ὑπηρέται ἀνοικοδομοῦσιν αὐτὸν.] May not this allude to the temple which the Emperor Hadrian erected at Jeruſalem?

" repentance."

" repentance." From this ſaying, imperfectly underſtood, the author of the epiſtle concluded, that as the apoſtles were *called* in an eſpecial manner, they muſt needs have been ſinners above all others.

Here we may ſee an example of the ſad conſequences which the haſty and injudicious notions of our friends too often produce. Our adverſaries, ſuch as Celſus, being on the watch, lay hold of them, and turn them to their own purpoſes. The Evangelical Hiſtory is open to all; and from that Hiſtory alone can we learn, whether thoſe who, in the firſt days of Chriſtianity, acknowledged Jeſus to be the Meſſiah, were " moſt abandoned ſinners."

Amongſt the firſt who witneſſed this good confeſſion was Symeon. All that we know of his character is, that he was " a man juſt and devout, wait-
" ing for the conſolation of Iſrael *."

The next is Anna, a woman indeed, but, with Mr Gibbon's good leave, not " oppreſſed by the
" conſciouſneſs, and even effects of her vices."
" She was of great age, and had lived with an huſ-
" band ſeven years from her virginity; and ſhe *was*
" a widow of about four ſcore and four years,
" which departed not from the temple, but ſerved
" *God* with faſtings and prayers night and day †."

When Jeſus choſe Andrew, Peter, James, and John to be his apoſtles, he found them induſtriouſly occupied in their vocation of fiſhermen ‡. But nei-

* δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβὴς, προσδεχόμενος παράκλησιν τῆ Ισράηλ. *Luke*, c. ii. v. 25.

† *Luke*, c. ii. v. 36. 37. ‡ *Matth.* c. iv. v. 18.—22.

ther on that occaſion, nor on any other, do we ſee him addreſſing himſelf to them, as to men more ſinful than the other inhabitants of Galilee. Sinners, no doubt, they were; and even after they became the diſciples of Jeſus, they retained popular and national prejudices; and, it muſt be acknowledged, that their character does not come up to our idea of Chriſtian perfection.

Matthew ſat at the receipt of cuſtom when Jeſus called him *. The office of publican was in diſrepute amongſt the Jews; yet we ought not from thence to ſuppoſe Matthew to have been a bad man, and much leſs, "a moſt abandoned ſinner." The office, however rapaciouſly exerciſed by many, was innocent in itſelf: for when publicans came to be baptiſed of John, and "ſaid unto him, Maſter, "what ſhall we do? he ſaid unto them, Exact no "more than that which is appointed you †." But he did not enjoin them to relinquiſh their employment, as being ſinful.

Had the apoſtles and firſt diſciples of Jeſus been, in general, men of profligate lives, we might have expected, from the known candour of the evangeliſts, that a circumſtance ſo remarkable would not have been paſſed over in ſilence: and this the rather, becauſe the evangeliſts are careful in recording the faults and errors of thoſe apoſtles and diſciples, even after they became followers of Jeſus.

Concerning one diſciple, in particular, we learn, from the higheſt authority, that he was not "a

* *Matth.* c. ix. v. 9. *Mark*, c. ii. v. 14. *Luke*, c. v. v. 27. 28.

† *Luke*, c. iii. v. 12. 13.

"moſt

" moſt abandoned ſinner." For it is thus written: " Jeſus ſaw Nathaniel coming to him, and ſaith of " him, behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom is no " guile *."

And, without meaning to depreciate the efficacy of divine grace, we may conjecture, that, in the natural diſpoſitions † of the diſciple " whom Jeſus " loved," there was ſomething peculiarly amiable.

Jeſus came " to call ſinners to repentance." And *the heavy laden*, who on this gracious invitation repaired to him, found reſt. It is no leſs certain, that, after their converſion, great ſinners would love him much.

But it is both unwarrantable and dangerous to conclude from this, that the diſciples of Jeſus, before they heard and obeyed his call to faith and repentance, were, in general, perſons of profligate lives, or " moſt abandoned ſinners."

It is *unwarrantable* to ſay ſo; becauſe ſuch an hypotheſis has no authority from Scripture; and that it is *dangerous* will be preſently ſeen.

When Jeſus appeared upon earth, there prevailed a general expectation of the coming of the Meſſiah.

To prove that *he* was *that* Meſſiah, Jeſus appealed, to prophecies already fulfilled, or which were

* *John*, c. i. v. 48.

† Thus, John, Peter, and Thomas, all partook of the divine grace; and yet the diverſity of character in thoſe three apoſtles induces us to conclude, that their *natural diſpoſitions* were different. On conſulting partial or fictitious accounts of holy perſons, we find them all, as it were, caſt in the ſame mould.

gradually fulfilling in him; to the doctrine which he taught; and to the miracles which he performed.

Now we ought to weigh all circumstances well before we pronounce, that "many most abandoned "sinners," such as lewd women, robbers, and assassins, were the persons who first discerned the fulfilling of the prophecies in Jesus, the excellence of his doctrine, and the truth of his miracles.

And we ought to be more cautious still, before we pronounce, from the nature of the thing, that persons placed in "the cold mediocrity of reason" could hardly have become Christians at all.

By the preaching of Peter, on the day of Pentecost, there were added to the Church "about three "thousand souls."

From the abridgement of his discourse, as given by St Luke *, it appears that he did not confine himself to such topics as might raise "emotions of "shame, grief, and terror," in his hearers. His discourse was addressed to their reason, no less than to their passions. It appealed to prophecy; to "the miracles, wonders, and signs, which God "wrought by Jesus;" to the late fact of his resurrection; and to one still later, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

* *Acts*, c. ii. v. 40. The expression, "abridgement "of his discourse," is used, because St Luke says, "with many other words did he testify," c. ii. v. 40. [Ἑτέροις τε λόγοις πλείοσι διεμαρτύρετο.] that is, "he said "*much* more, and he appealed to *other* evidence." All this, although material, is lost or obscured in our vulgar translation.

At

At the beginning of the chapter, mention is made of "devout men;" and there is all reaſon to believe from the context, that thoſe men were hearers of St Peter. Does Mr Gibbon reckon amongſt his *wonderful converſions* *, that great increaſe of the Chriſtian church, of which St Peter was the inſtrument? If he does, he muſt either hold, that thoſe "devout men" were not convinced by the *arguments* of the Apoſtle, or he muſt diſtinguiſh them from his "many moſt abandoned ſinners."

Mr Gibbon ſays, that Jeſus diſdained not the ſociety "of men, and *eſpecially of women*, oppreſſed "by conſciouſneſs, and very often by the effects of "their vices."

It is no doubt true, that Jeſus did not avoid the company of thoſe who led vicious lives; and that he even invited them to repentance. But we have no authority from the Scriptures to aſſert that there were many perſons of that denomination, and *eſpecially women*, who obeyed his gracious call, and became his diſciples.

There is one example of this ſort, in the caſe of that female penitent whoſe converſion is recorded

* There is ſome cauſe for ſuſpecting that by the general phraſe, "ſo many wonderful converſions," Mr Gibbon had in view, not ſo much what occurred at the firſt promulgation of Chriſtianity, as what is ſaid to have occurred ſince its eſtabliſhment. To excite a ſenſe of ſin, and its conſequences, in perſons who acknowledge Chriſt's miſſion, is a very different thing from convincing Jews and Heathens of the truth of that miſſion: in the *former* of thoſe caſes, there may be more room for the paſſions to work, than there could be in the *latter*.

by

by St Luke *, and to whom our Lord ſaid, " Thy " faith hath ſaved thee; go in peace."

But ſurely the circumſtances of her ſtory do not warrant the expreſſion which Mr Gibbon has thought fit to uſe; and there is, if poſſible, ſtill leſs

* *Luke*, c. vii. v. 36.—50. The name of this tender-hearted and humble penitent is not known. Many commentators, from Chryſoſtom down to Grotius, ſuppoſe her to have been *Mary Magdalene:* but this is merely a fanciful conjecture, without evidence. The author of *the Golden Legends* goes a ſtep further, and ventures to aſſert, that " the woman in the city, which was a ſinner, " Mary Magdalene, and Mary the ſiſter of Lazarus," are three ſeveral appellations of the ſame perſon. He ſays, that the caſtle of *Magdalum*, and Bethany, together with large poſſeſſions in Jeruſalem, belonged to Lazarus, and his two ſiſters Martha and Mary; that they divided the inheritance; and that the caſtle of Magdalum fell to the ſhare of Mary, who on that account was called *Magdalene*. Mary, continues the *hiſtorian*, being very rich and beautiful, abandoned herſelf ſo exceſſively to unlawful pleaſures, that ſhe loſt her own name, and got *that* of *the ſinner*. After having accommodated all this, as well as he could, to the converſion of the penitent woman in St Luke, he adds, " this is the Mary " Magdalene whom the Lord placed on a footing of " moſt intimate familiarity, ſo that he made himſelf her " gueſt, and had her for his purveyor in his journeys. " *Hæc eſt illa* Maria Magdalena — *Dominus eam fami-* " *liariſſimam ſibi conſtituit, hoſpitam ſuam fecit, procu-* " *ratricem eam in itinere habuit.*" *Sanct. Legend.* fol. 160. b. edit. 1476. The expreſſion in Mr Gibbon correſponds better with *the Golden Legends*, than with the Evangelical Hiſtory.

warrant

warrant for his applying it to the conduct of the apoſtles.

The nature of Mr Gibbon's general obſervations would have been more diſcernible, had he illuſtrated them by examples drawn from the Evangelical Hiſtory. As he has omitted this, we are left to mere conjecture; and poſſibly we may imagine that he alludes to "eminent ſaints" who were not in his thought.

Perhaps he had St Paul in his view; a moſt eminent ſaint indeed, but who nevertheleſs acknowledged himſelf to be "the chief of ſinners *."

If ſo, it may be fit to remind him, that *that* apoſtle was at no time a "moſt abandoned ſinner," in the common acceptation of the phraſe; but, on the contrary, was one who "derived a calm ſatiſ-"faction from the opinion of his own rectitude."

St Paul, ſpeaking of his ſtate while he was yet a perſecutor, ſays, that he had been "taught accor-"ding to the perfect manner of the law of the fa-"thers, and was zealous towards God †;" that, "after the ſtricteſt ſect of the *Jewiſh* religion, *he* "lived a Phariſee ‡;" and at the ſame time, for his "manner of life from his youth," he appealed to the evidence of his accuſers themſelves.

And more particularly ſtill, he ſpeaks of himſelf

* 1 *Tim.* c. i. v. 15.

† *Acts*, c. xxii. v. 3. "The perfect manner," [ἀκρίβειαν], that is, "the accuracy" or "ſtrictneſs." So at c. xxvi. v. 5. κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἵρεσιν, is tranſlated, "after the moſt *ſtricteſt* ſect."

‡ *Acts*, c. xxvi. v. 5.

to

to the Philippians, as of one "touching the righ-
"teouſneſs which *is* of the law, blameleſs *."

Yet he acknowledged, that he was "the chief of
"ſinners."

There was an interval of upwards of *thirty* years between the time at which Saul, "breathing out "threatenings and ſlaughter againſt the diſciples, "made havock of the church †;" and the time at which St Paul made this acknowledgement to his friend Timothy.

The labours and the ſufferings which that good man had undergone in the cauſe of Chriſt, and for the ſake of the brethren, were great; yet all that he had done and ſuffered could not reconcile him to himſelf, or make him overlook what he had been.

"Many of the ſaints," ſays he in another place, "did I ſhut up in priſon—and when they were put "to death I gave my voice againſt *them*; and I pu-"niſhed them oft in every ſynagogue, and compel-"led *them* to blaſpheme ‡."

Not

* *Philip.* c. iii. v. 6.

† *Acts*, c. viii. v. 3.; c. ix. v. 1. The phraſes, ἔλι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνυ, and ἐλυμαίνελο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, have an energy in the original, which the tranſlation, "breathing out threatenings and ſlaughter," and "made havock of the church," does not expreſs.

‡ *Acts*, c. xxvi. v. 10. 11. This word "blaſpheme," [βλασφημεῖν,] may be illuſtrated from a paſſage in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, § 10. Εγκειμένυ δὲ τυ ἀνθυπάλυ καὶ λέγονλος, ὄμοσον, καὶ ἀπολύω σε; λοιδόρησον τὸν Χρι-

σλόν.

Not only was he active in procuring the impriſonment of the diſciples, in concurring with the popular cry againſt them, and in maltreating them, even when they were engaged in the ſolemn offices of religion; but he alſo forced, or attempted to force them to revile Chriſt.

Filled with the recollection of all theſe things, St Paul ſaid, " I thank Chriſt Jeſus our Lord, who " hath enabled me, for that he counted me faith- " ful, putting me into the miniſtry; who was be- " fore a blaſphemer, and a perſecutor, and inju- " rious. But I obtained mercy, becauſe I did it ig- " norantly in unbelief: And the grace of our Lord " was exceeding abundant, with faith and love, " which is in Chriſt Jeſus. This is a faithful ſaying, " and worthy of all acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus " came into the world to ſave ſinners; of whom I " am the chief. Howbeit, for this cauſe I obtained " mercy, that in me firſt Jeſus Chriſt might ſhew " forth all long-ſuffering, for a pattern to them " which ſhould hereafter believe on him to life " everlaſting *."

If

σῆόν· ὁ Πολύκαρπος ἔφη, Ογδοήκονῆα καὶ ἕξ ἔῆη δυλεύω αὐῆῳ, καὶ ὐδέν με ἠδίκησεν; καὶ πῶς δύναμαι βλασφημῆσαι τὸν βασιλέα μυ, τὸν σώσανῆά με? " And when the Pro- " conſul ſtill urged him, ſaying, ſwear, [by the fortune " of Cæſar], and I will ſet thee free; *revile* Chriſt; " Polycarp thus ſpake: Theſe four-ſcore and ſix years " ſerve I him, and he has never wronged me; how then " can I *blaſpheme* my King and my Saviour?" *Remains of Chriſtian Antiquity*, v. 1. p. 12.

* 1 *Tim.* c. i. v. 12. — 16. " Injurious, [ὑβρισῆὴν],

If then Mr Gibbon meant to place St Paul amongſt thoſe who, before their converſion to Chriſtianity, were "abandoned ſinners," he did injuſtice to the character of the moſt candid of men.

Mr Gibbon ſays, that "thoſe perſons who, in "the world, had followed, though in an imperfect "manner, the dictates of benevolence and pro-"priety, derived ſuch a calm ſatisfaction from the "opinion of their own rectitude, as rendered them "much leſs ſuſceptible of the emotions — which "have given birth to ſo many wonderful conver-"ſions."

It has been already obſerved, in paſſing, that *this* is not applicable to the Jews, who, when our Lord appeared upon earth, were looking earneſtly for "the hope and conſolation of Iſrael *;" and it would have been ſtrange indeed, if "abandoned "ſinners" alone, or eſpecially perſons of ſuch a character, had ſearched the Scriptures at that time,

might be paraphraſed, "one who added inſult to in-"jury." When St Paul ſaid, that he perſecuted the brethren "ignorantly in unbelief," [ἀγνοῶν ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ] he did not mean, that he was in a ſituation which excluded him from the knowledge of the truth. It is more probable, that he alluded to the words of our Lord, *Luke*, c. xxiii. v. 34. "Father forgive them, for they "KNOW not what they do." [Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς· οὐ γὰρ οἴδασι τί ποιοῦσι.] as St Peter did on another occaſion, when he ſaid, "And now, brethren, I wot that through IGNORANCE ye did *it*." *Acts*, c. iii. v. 17. See all this better explained, *Hurd.* Serm. vol. ii. ſerm. vii.

* *Acts*, c. xxviii. v. 20. *Luke*, c. ii. v. 25.

and

and compared what was ſaid of the Meſſiah in them, with what Jeſus taught and did.

The Heathens, who were *ſatisfied* with their own rectitude, becauſe they had followed the dictates of benevolence in an *imperfect manner*, could hardly have aimed at that *Chriſtian perfection* which Mr Gibbon admires and applauds.

If Epicureans enjoyed calm ſatisfaction, without believing in Providence; and Stoics, without having any certain and conſiſtent notions of a future ſtate; and the numerous tribe of Sceptics, without knowing what to believe at all; they would, no doubt, be ill diſpoſed for receiving, from Jewiſh fiſhermen and tent-makers, a ſyſtem of *faith*, founded on the principle of a *Providence*, and on the aſſurance of *immortality*.

Such were the *wiſe* and the *mighty* amongſt the Heathens in the earlieſt days of the church; and, as we may well imagine, few of them became converts to the Chriſtian religion.

But let us examine the caſe of perſons in the middle and lower ranks of life; for it is certain that the Heathens, who in the apoſtolical age embraced Chriſtianity, were generally of that ſort. The queſtion is, Whether, before their converſion, they were worſe men than the other Heathens who rejected the goſpel? If they were not, Mr Gibbon's argument from *the reaſon of the thing* may be laid aſide, together with his *theory of emotions*.

Julian indeed affirms on this ſubject, what Mr Gibbon ſeems to ſuppoſe, and he gives St. Paul for his authority; but he makes a *little* alteration in the words of the Apoſtle, and quotes him as having

ſaid, "ſuch ye were," inſtead of "ſuch were *ſome* "of you *."

Although all the Corinthian converts to whom St Paul addreſſes himſelf, had been guilty of ſome one or other of the ſins that he mentions, it would not follow, that they were worſe men than thoſe who rejected the goſpel.

The profligacy of the Heathens in the apoſtolical age was much more enormous than ſome people know, or at leaſt are inclined to confeſs.

Some of the things mentioned by St. Paul belonged to the very profeſſion of Paganiſm, ſuch as thoſe ſuperſtitious and impure rites which come under the general name of "idolatry."

Other things alſo, which occur in the ſame paſſage, had too much countenance from the popular religion; were practiſed, without reſerve, by the people †; and, to ſay no more, were connived at by the magiſtrate.

Corinth, for example, was vicious beyond the meaſure of vice in great cities. Strabo relates, that the temple of Venus, at Corinth, was exccedingly

* 1 *Cor.* c. vi. v. 11. Καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε.—Ὑμεῖς τοιοῦτοι ἦτε. *Cyril.* adv. Julian. l. vii. p. 245. edit. *Spanheim.*

† Here let me remark, that an expreſſion in Mr Gibbon's work, not altogether foreign to the preſent ſubject, appears exceedingly reprehenſible. He ſays, with what juſtice I mean not to inquire, that "of the firſt fifteen "Roman Emperors, Claudius was the only one *whoſe* "*taſte in love was entirely correct.*" vol. i. p. 93. note 40. This is ſaid of an Emperor who was very lewd, and who lived in inceſt. As to the others, it ſeems *their taſte in love was not entirely correct.* What a ſtrange circumlocution!

rich,

rich, ſo as to have in property more than a thouſand harlots, the ſlaves [or miniſters] of the temple, donatives made to the goddeſs by perſons of both ſexes. Hence, ſays he, the city was crowded, and became wealthy *.

The orgies of Bacchus made part of the *chearful* religion of Paganiſm; and they would have afforded a decent apology for drunkenneſs, had the Greeks required any thing of that nature: but it is probable that thoſe rites, as well as many others, were formed on the manners of the people; and that, if the vulgar Greeks had not been drunkards, their prieſts and legiſlators, would not have made drunkenneſs an ingredient in the vulgar religion.

* Τό τε τῆς Αφροδίτης ἱερὸν ὕλω πλήσιον ὑπῆρξεν, ὥσθ' πλείυς ἡ χιλίας ἱεροδύλυς ἐκέκλητο ἑλαίρας, ὅς ἀνετιθεσαν τῇ θεῷ καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες; καὶ διὰ τάυτας ἦν πολυωχλεῖτο ἡ πολις, καὶ ἐπλυτίζετο. *l.* viii. p. 581. To this it is that Stephanus Byzantinus refers. Καὶ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΑΖΟΜΑΙ, τὸ ἑλαιρεῖν; ἀπο τῶν ἐν Κορινθῳ ἑταίρων, κ. τ. ε. *De Urbibus.* v ΚΟΡΙΝΘΟΣ. Hence alſo the proverbial expreſſion, Ἀ Κορίνθία ἔοικας, κ. τ. ε. and the public prayers in that city, "for the increaſe of the "number of harlots." From a brothel of ſuch magnitude, maintained by the *piety* of the people, univerſal corruption of manners muſt have enſued: and although *that* Corinth which the Apoſtle ſaw might have exhibited but a poor epitome of her more ancient debaucheries; yet climate, ſituation, and religion being conſidered, we muſt acknowledge the propriety of his exhortation, φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν, 1 *Cor.* c. vi. v. 18. And this will lead us to remark, that his tranſition in that chapter from one ſubject to another is not ſo abrupt as at firſt ſight we may be apt to imagine it.

No

No one who is acquainted with what may be termed the national character of the Greeks, will deny that they were "revilers." While they were free, or ſuppoſed themſelves to be free, this intemperance of language reſembled liberty; and their conquerors, when they deprived them of every thing elſe, left them in full poſſeſſion of their petulant humour *.

From this humour it is that we can account for a ſingular circumſtance in their hiſtory, that the Cynics, a ſect of philoſophers, with ſmall pretenſions to knowledge, and none to virtue, were harboured and tolerated, and even encouraged in Greece, during a long ſucceſſion of ages.

Mr Gibbon ſays, that the ſudden emotions of ſhame and terror had a *wonderful* effect in the converting of men, and eſpecially of women, to the Chriſtian religion.

It muſt, however, be obvious to every one, that this implies ſome antecedent knowledge of Chriſtianity, and belief in its truth: for as the Heathens in general practiſed, without ſhame, many things inconſiſtent with evangelical purity; it behoved the converts from Heatheniſm to learn that ſuch practices were ſhameful, before they became aſhamed of them.

Neither is it likely that emotions of terror, of ter-

* This humour was very ancient. Homer, it is probable, ſpake the language of the people; and he makes his gods and his goddeſſes uſe great liberties in their familiar converſation. — It would be vain to attempt to make a collection of all the words which expreſs intemperance of ſpeech in the Greek language, ſuch as φιλολοίδορος, βαρύγλωσσος, πικρόγλωσσος, βλάσφημος, δύσφημος, κακόφημος, &c. &c.

ror

ror " new and unexpected," as Mr Gibbon elſewhere expreſſes himſelf, could have been raiſed without a previous perſuaſion of a judgement to come, and of the danger of delaying repentance.

And thus we may conclude, that *faith* was the ground-work of converſion in thoſe Heathens who, at the promulgation of the goſpel, embraced Chriſtianity: and we may alſo be enabled to form a right eſtimate of an hypotheſis mentioned by Mr Gibbon in this paſſage, and more largely explained in another, where he ſays, that " the careleſs Polytheiſt " was aſſailed by new and unexpected terrors, a- " gainſt which neither his prieſts nor his philoſo- " phers could afford him any certain protection;" and that " his fears might aſſiſt his faith and his " reaſon; and if he could once *perſuade himſelf to* " *ſuſpect* that the Chriſtian religion might *poſſibly* " be true, it became *an eaſy taſk to convince him* " that it was the ſafeſt and moſt prudent party that " he could poſſibly embrace *."

Mr Gibbon adds the reaſon which induced the profligate rable, on becoming Chriſtians, to become remarkably devout and zealous in good works.—His ſolution of this ſuppoſed phœnomenon is ſhort and ſimple. " The deſire of perfection," ſays he, " be- " came the ruling paſſion of their ſoul; and *it is* " *well known*, that, while reaſon embraces a cold " mediocrity, our paſſions hurry us, with rapid vio- " ence, over the ſpace which lies between the moſt " oppoſite extremes."

* Vol. i. p. 567. See *Matth.* c. xiii. v. 20. 21. where a more favourable caſe is put, but with a leſs favourable inference.

When

When an author ſpeaks of a thing that *is well known*, he ought to expreſs that thing in unambiguous language.

It is not certain whether Mr Gibbon meant to place his "cold mediocrity of reaſon" between the extremes of profligacy and perfect virtue, or between the extremes of irreligion and perfect devotion.

By taking his words in their utmoſt latitude we ſhall be ſure to comprehend his meaning. He appeals to general experience and knowledge in proof of this fact, that while reaſon embraces a cold mediocrity, our paſſions hurry us rapidly from profligacy and irreligion to perfect virtue and devotion.

Different men will incline to graduate the moral weather-glaſs in different ways; and ſome, on reflecting that there is much to fear and much to hope, may be apt to remove reaſon at a greater diſtance from the *freezing point*, than "cold mediocrity" ſeems to be placed.

Mr Gibbon muſt allow me to deny, that it is well known that our paſſions hurry us rapidly, from irreligion to perfect devotion, or from profligacy to perfect virtue; for experience, to ſay nothing of revelation, aſſures us of the contrary.

Let me not be underſtood to deny that there are inſtances of men who have at once, from a life of irreligion and profligacy, attained to as perfect devotion and virtue as are attainable on this ſide the grave. I agree with Mr Gibbon, that ſuch converſions are "wonderful:" but he ought not to aſcribe them to our paſſions; for then they would not be "wonderful" to men who, like Mr Gibbon, can analyſe the paſſions, and trace *natural* motives to their correſponding effects.

The *ſecond* motive "which might *naturally* render "the lives of the primitive Chriſtians much purer "and more auſtere than thoſe of their Pagan con- "temporaries," is ſaid by Mr Gibbon to have been "the deſire of ſupporting the reputation of the ſo- "ciety in which they were engaged, and their own "reputation, as connected with that ſociety."

But unleſs the Chriſtians had been incited to virtue by other motives than a regard for their own reputation, and for that of the ſociety to which they belonged, the conſequences, with reſpect to morals and behaviour, would not have been either univerſal or permanent.

The philoſophers who appeared in the Heathen world had thoſe motives, joined to an exceſſive deſire after fame; and yet they were not ſuch men as Mr Gibbon acknowledges the primitive Chriſtians to have been.

Jeſus foretold, and the prediction was ſoon accompliſhed, that his diſciples ſhould be reviled and perſecuted for his ſake *.

Reputation could not have been the object of men who were taught by their Lord to look for obloquy as the appendage of their profeſſion.

* "Bleſſed *are* they which are perſecuted for righ- "teouſneſs ſake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you, and perſe- "cute *you*, and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you "falſely for my ſake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: "for great *is* your reward in heaven: for ſo perſecuted "they the prophets which were before you." *Matt.* c. v. v. 10.—12.

We muſt therefore ſearch for ſome other cauſe, which enabled thoſe Chriſtians to be more excellent than their neighbours.

Their motive to the practice of virtue, ſeparate from the motives commonly termed *natural*, was, obedience to the lawgiver whoſe authority they recogniſed; or, in ſcriptural language, faith in God the Father, and in his Son the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

Mr Gibbon, not ſatisfied with *ſlightly* mentioning two motives which contributed to the purity of the lives of the primitive Chriſtians, ſubjoins a ſupplement, accounting, in a natural way, for their virtues.

Some of the readers of the *Decline and Fall* have cenſured this Supplement as uncandid, and even invidious.

The primitive Chriſtians, as Mr Gibbon admits, were chaſte, temperate, and œconomical; "but "then," ſays he, "their ſerious and ſequeſtered "life, averſe to the gay luxury of the age, inured "them to chaſtity, temperance, œconomy, and all "the ſober and domeſtic virtues."

They were remarkable for integrity and fair dealing. But as they were generally of ſome trade or profeſſion, it was incumbent on them to practiſe ſuch virtues, in order to remove the ſuſpicions that an appearance of ſanctity is apt to create.

They were humble, meek, and patient, being exerciſed in the habits of thoſe virtues by their contempt of the world.

The more they were perſecuted, the more cloſely they adhered to each other.

Their mutual charity, and unſuſpecting confidence,

dence, have been remarked by infidels, and were too often abuſed by perfidious friends *.

And now, let us review the virtues of the primitive Chriſtians, while with *philoſophical* impartiality we trace effects to their cauſes.

The primitive Chriſtians, from their ſerious and

* We might add, that their mutual charity is acknowledged, and their unſuſpecting confidence ridiculed, by the Atheiſtical buffoon, Lucian. Mr Gibbon ſays, p. 86. "The philoſopher Peregrinus, of whoſe life and death "Lucian has left us ſo entertaining an account, impo-"ſed for a long time on the credulous ſimplicity of the "Chriſtians of Aſia." It is impoſſible to determine any thing as to the real character of this Peregrinus while he retained his ſenſes. This only we know, that he became mad, and burnt himſelf alive, in the ſight of all Greece, at the Olympian games. Gellius, who knew him well, praiſes his judgement and equanimity, and ſays, that his diſcourſes were profitable, and delivered in a ſeemly manner. ["Philoſophum nomine *Peregrinum*, "cui poſtea cognomentum *Proteus* factum eſt, virum "gravem atque conſtantem vidimus, quum Athenis eſ-"ſemus, diverſantem in quodam tugurio extra urbem; "quumque ad eum frequenter ventitaremus, multa her-"cle dicere eum utiliter et honeſtè audivimus."] *Nocl. Att.* xii. 11. Gellius could not have deſcribed a chief teacher among the Stoics in higher ſtrains of commendation. So, if Peregrinus was a knave, he impoſed on the credulity of Gellius, a Heathen grammarian, no leſs than on the credulity of the Chriſtians of Aſia; who, to ſay the worſt of them, had not the gift of trying the ſpirits of men, and, through an exceſs of charity, were led to think more favourably of Peregrinus than he deſerved.

ſequeſtered life, were chaſte, temperate, frugal, and inured to all ſober and domeſtic virtues.

From prudence and ſituation they were of ſtrict integrity, and perfectly fair in their dealings.

From contempt of the world, they learnt to be humble, meek, and patient.

Perſecution bound them cloſer in friendſhip to one another.

Their mutual charity has been remarked even by infidels; and their exceſs in that virtue laid them open to the frauds of bad men.

If we thus employ ourſelves in *accounting* for every virtue practiſed by individuals, it is much to be feared that, in the end, we may loſe that amiable quality of Chriſtian benevolence, which "thinketh no "evil."

Jeſus has left a more humane rule to his friends. We are to know men by their fruits; we are to judge of purpoſe by actions: and indeed any further knowledge is too high for us.

Here it will not eſcape obſervation, that Mr Gibbon, without intending to draw a very favourable likeneſs of the primitive Chriſtians, has made Chriſtian principles the ground-work of many of their virtues.

Thus he ſays, that "the *ſerious* and ſequeſtered "life of the primitive Chriſtians, averſe to the gay "luxury of the age, inured them to chaſtity, tem-"perance, œconomy, and all the ſober and dome-"ſtic virtues."

Now the epithet "ſerious," is of more conſequence than it may at firſt ſight appear. For a ſequeſtered life, averſe "to the gay luxury of the "age,"

" age," is not neceſſarily attended by " all the ſober " and domeſtic virtues." The reverſe of all ſuch virtues may be found amongſt men who have never heard of the gay luxury of the age. But, " a ſe- " rious life," or a life led with an habitual regard to the nature and conſequences of action, may to a certain degree produce the virtues of which Mr Gibbon ſpeaks; and thus the meaning will be, that ſuch virtues are the conſequence of Chriſtian watchfulneſs: an important truth, and greatly to the honour of Chriſtianity!

Again, Mr Gibbon ſays, that from *contempt of the world* the Chriſtians learnt to be humble, meek, and patient.

The phraſe " contempt of the world" is ambiguous: it may ſignify " contempt of the ſuperfluities and vanity of the world," or " contempt of all ſublunary " things." But whether it be underſtood in the one ſenſe or the other, there is no doubt that ſome ſects amongſt the Heathen philoſophers profeſſed as great contempt of the world as any of the primitive Chriſtians ever did; and yet their ſpeculations and ſyſtems were of no efficacy in rendering them humble and meek; and we may oppoſe Chriſtian patience to the boaſted apathy of the Stoics, without any dread of ſeeing our religion depreciated by the contraſt.

It was on Chriſtian principles that the primitive Chriſtians learnt to be humble, meek, and patient: for they remembered the words of their Lord, " Whoſo ſhall exalt himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he " that ſhall humble himſelf ſhall be exalted." " Bleſ- " ſed are the meek."— " Learn of me, for I am " meek

" meek and lowly in heart, and ye ſhall find reſt to " your ſouls."—" He that endureth to the end " ſhall be ſaved *."

One ſhould have thought that Mr Gibbon, after having treated of repentance and reputation, and analyzed the Chriſtian virtues, and accounted for them all, had exhauſted whatever he meant to ſay on the *fourth* ſecondary cauſe of the *rapid* and *remarkable* growth of Chriſtianity.

Yet to the diſquiſition concerning the " Virtues " of the primitive Chriſtians," a large miſcellany of unconnected obſervations is ſubjoined under theſe general heads, " Morality of the fathers;" " Prin- " ciples of human nature;" " The primitive Chri- " ſtians condemn pleaſure and luxury;" " Their " ſentiments concerning marriage and chaſtity;" and " Their averſion to the buſineſs of war and go- " vernment."

It would have been better, and more ſcientifical, had Mr Gibbon, inſtead of deviating into collateral inquiries, adhered to that method which he at firſt choſe to preſcribe to himſelf.

The purpoſe of this work is to examine the five ſecondary cauſes aſſigned by Mr Gibbon for the rapid and remarkable progreſs of Chriſtianity; and therefore I might be pardoned for declining to fol-

* *Matth.* c. xxiii. v. 12.; c. v. v. 5.; c. xi. v. 29.; c. x. v. 22. Various other texts to the like purpoſe might have been quoted from the other Evangeliſts. Many paſſages in the Epiſtles are merely a commentary on ſuch texts, and ought to be conſidered as alluſions to evangelical hiſtory.

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low him where-ever his fancy or genius leads; yet there is ſuch a variety of curious and intereſting matter in his miſcellaneous obſervations, that I cannot altogether paſs them over in ſilence.

Let it be remarked in general, that the chief circumſtances mentioned in this miſcellany ſeem to have had a natural tendency to retard, inſtead of accelerating the triumphs of Chriſtianity over the paſſions, prejudices, and opinions of mankind.

Neither is this all: for on comparing his ſupplementary diſquiſitions with his argument on the fourth ſecondary cauſe, it will be found, that Mr Gibbon contradicts not only experience, but himſelf.

Thus, for example, he ſays, "The biſhops and "doctors of the church—carried the duties of ſelf-"mortification, of purity, and of patience, to a "height which it is ſcarcely poſſible to attain, and "much leſs to preſerve. — A doctrine ſo extraordi-"nary and ſo ſublime muſt inevitably command the "veneration of the people; but it was ill calculated "to obtain the ſuffrage of thoſe worldly philoſo-"phers who, in the conduct of this tranſitory life, "conſult only the feelings of nature, and the inte-"reſt of ſociety." [p. 575.]

Here the Chriſtian teachers are put in full poſſeſſion of the veneration of the people; and yet in the very *next* page Mr Gibbon ſeems to aſcribe to the Chriſtians at large a diſpoſition that would be *rejected by the common conſent of mankind*; and he ſays, in unequivocal terms, that "it was not in "*this* world that the primitive Chriſtians were "deſirous of making themſelves either agreeable

"or

" or uſeful *." If ſo, they could not remain in poſſeſſion of the veneration of the people.

Let us turn back from p. 576. to p. 574. and we ſhall ſee that the Chriſtians, no leſs than the philoſophers themſelves, did " in this tranſitory life con-" ſult the intereſt of ſociety."

Their care for the intereſt of ſociety, it muſt be admitted, did not lead them " to conceal the ſenti-" ments of an Atheiſt under the ſacerdotal robes, " or to approach, with the ſame inward contempt " and the ſame external reverence, the altars of the " Lybian, the Olympian, and the Capitoline Jupi-" ter;" yet they were chaſte, temperate, and œconomical, and inured to all the ſober and domeſtic virtues. They were of the ſtricteſt integrity, and perfectly fair in their dealings: they were exerciſed in the habits of humility, meekneſs, and patience: and the infidels themſelves remarked their mutual charity and unſuſpecting confidence. So ſays Mr Gibbon, &c.

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* The words, " in *this* world," are redundant; for the primitive Chriſtians could not be deſirous of making themſelves *uſeful* in *another* world.